

PIQUÉ

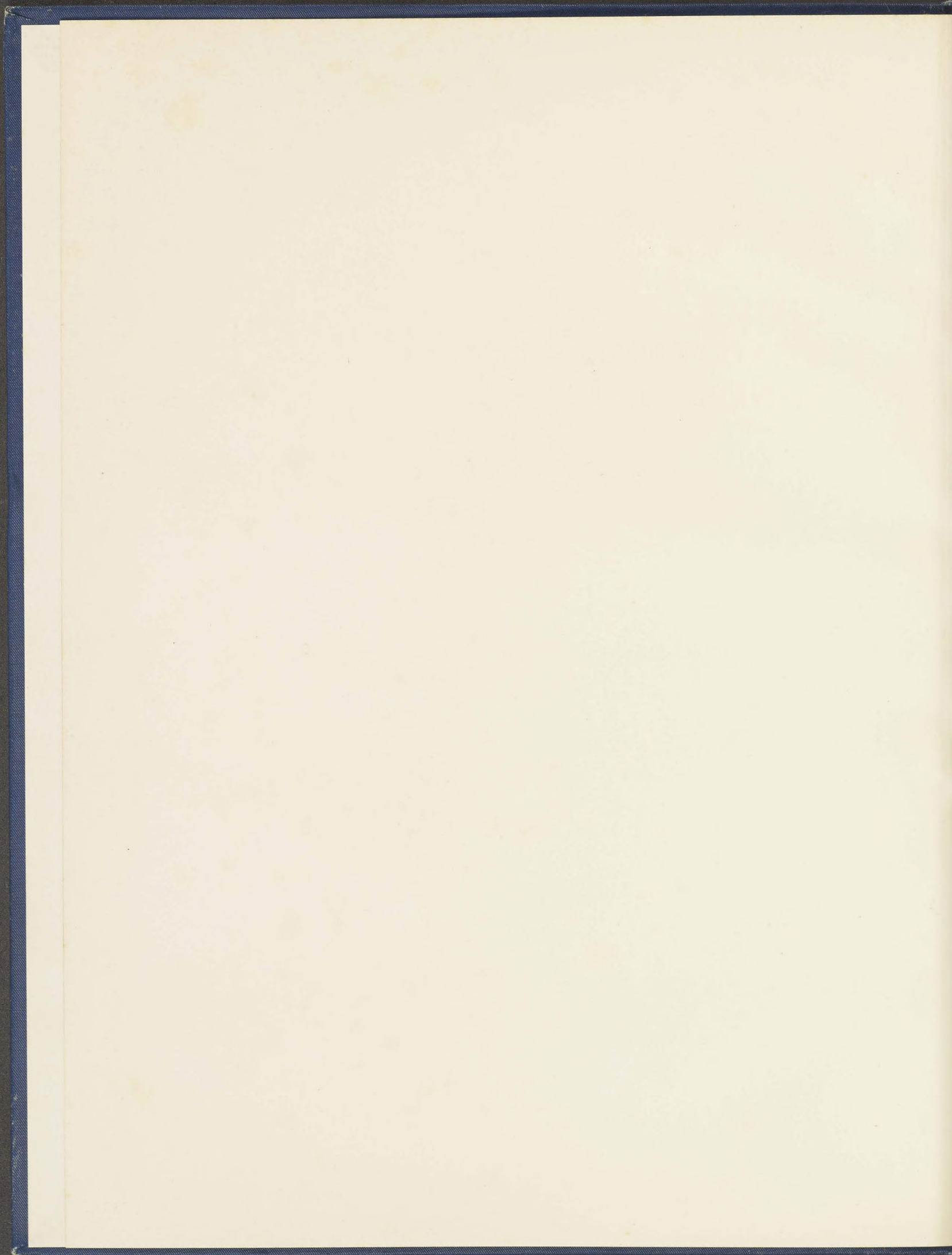
A BEAUTIFUL
MINOR ART

BY
HERBERT C. DENT

THE CONNOISSEUR

**THE
HENRY POLISSACK
COLLECTION**

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August 1970



THE CONNOISSEUR SERIES
OF BOOKS FOR COLLECTORS

PIQUÉ : A
BEAUTIFUL
MINOR ART

THIS VOLUME IS DEDICATED IN
ALL HUMILITY TO THE GREAT
FRENCH NATION
TO WHICH ART IS INDEBTED,
NOT ONLY FOR THE INCIDENCE,
BUT ALSO FOR THE HIGHEST
DEVELOPMENT OF THE BEAUTIFUL
HANDICRAFT OF
P I Q U É





PIQUÉ CABINET. LOUIS XIV., LATE PERIOD.

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THE CONNOISSEUR SERIES OF BOOKS FOR COLLECTORS.

EDITED BY C. REGINALD GRUNDY.

PIQUÉ:

A BEAUTIFUL MINOR ART

BY

HERBERT C. DENT

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

C. REGINALD GRUNDY

WITH THIRTY-SIX PLATES



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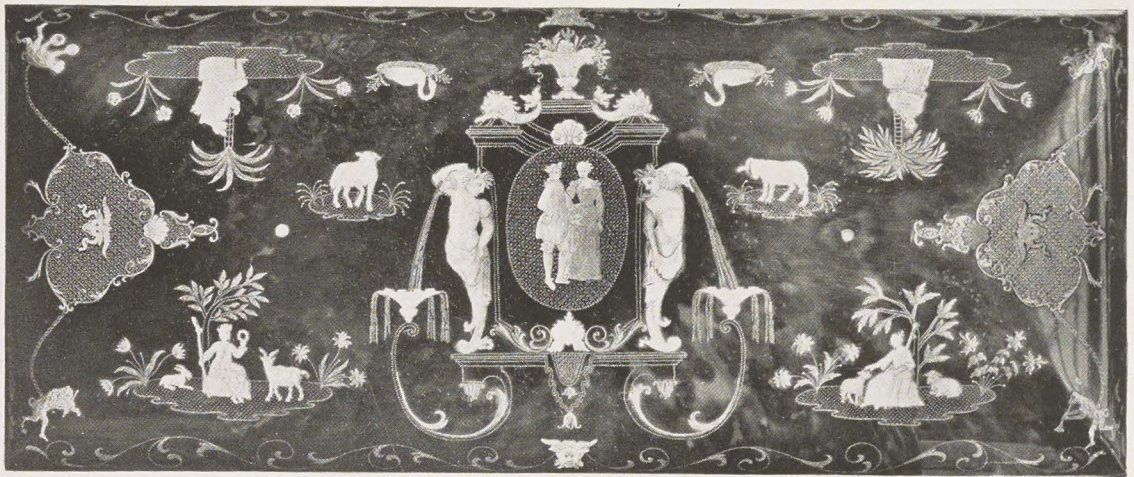
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PLATE II.



LOUIS XIV. DETAILS ON LID OF CABINET SHOWN IN PLATE I.

Ladie May Morse
Jan 4 '30



INTRODUCTION

BY

C. REGINALD GRUNDY

THE great period of French industrial art came in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It was the epoch when the whole resources of the nation were more or less concentrated on the exaltation of the monarchy, and the Kings of France, heads of what was at once the richest, most formidable, and most cultured power of Europe, were able to devote an almost incredible amount of wealth to the patronage of painters, sculptors, architects, and craftsmen. The chief occupation of these workers was to provide beautiful creations for the delectation of the reigning monarch and his entourage. Huge palaces were erected, decorated within and without with that logical completeness which is the essential characteristic of French art at its best, and the buildings were filled with sumptuous furnishings. No object, however small, was thought unworthy of the craftsman's highest and most finished skill, while the larger pieces were fashioned in all their parts with the exquisite minuteness of jewellery.

Piqué appears to have originated at the beginning of this epoch. It was an art in which precious materials were employed to adorn other precious materials; in which gold or silver, in point or strip, was inlaid in tortoiseshell or other similar substances, often used in combination with mother-of-pearl, as an added decoration. In the best types of piqué these expensive materials are wrought together with such fine taste and craftsmanship that one almost loses sight of their rarity in admiring the exquisite artistry of the pieces fashioned from them.

Major Dent justly calls piqué "a beautiful minor art." It might be added that, of all the minor arts of its time, it most perfectly exemplifies the luxuriant spirit of the age, so much so, indeed, that if other evidences of French art and culture during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were lost, one could almost reconstruct a picture of them from the work in piqué produced during the period. These sumptuous and ornate articles, forming an integral part of the environment of the French aristocracy, could only have been evolved in a period when profusion existed side by side with poverty and the instinct for prodigal display was tempered by refined and highly cultured taste. The exquisite and laborious workmanship of fine piqué suggests a plentiful supply of highly skilled yet comparatively poorly paid labour, while the multitude of articles composed of piqué shows how largely it was used. Most of the objects were small, a necessary corollary to the expensiveness of the materials employed. They included such things as "snuff-boxes, étuis, bodkin-cases, scent-bottles, small drinking cups, trays, bonbonnières, shuttles, fan-sticks, etc.," but they also included more important items. Major Dent has come across a toilet set, a pair of bellows, large jewel boxes, a spinning wheel, and, most remarkable of all, a late Louis XIV. cabinet, which, with its stand, is made entirely of tortoiseshell. This

INTRODUCTION

wonderful work, formerly in Sir Julian Goldsmid's possession, is now in Major Dent's own collection. It is apparently unique, yet one may surmise that, had not Marlborough's victories greatly curtailed the wealth of France, and so checked the expenditure on costly and sumptuous furnishings, its creation might have been followed by many others of a similar character.

Piqué, if by no means exclusively a French art, must be emphatically regarded as an outcome of the French genius. One associates some of its most beautiful manifestations with the name of Charles André Boulle, but though he may have developed the methods of working in tortoiseshell, the practice of doing it had been in vogue away back in the first or second decade of the seventeenth century, at least half a century before he arrived at the fulness of his powers. It was not until the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, in 1685, dispersed French Huguenot craftsmen throughout Protestant Europe that the art began to be seriously practised outside France. England was specially favoured, and this country became the chief rival of France in the production of piqué. At first the *émigrés* exclusively followed their own traditions and methods, so that in work of this period it is almost impossible to decide from which side of the Channel it emanated. This was followed early in the eighteenth century by a time of decline, probably originating through the English apprentices and pupils of the foreign craftsmen being unable quickly to attain the dexterity of their masters. The work then produced became somewhat coarsened in execution and design. The recovery came later in the same century, when work, distinctively national in its characteristics, yet wanting neither in good taste nor delicacy, made its appearance. English piqué maintained this high standard until close on to the Victorian era, when, though good workmanship continued, the artistry of the designs fell away.

Besides the piqué actually produced in England, a great quantity of old French examples is also to be found in this country. Not only was it bought extensively, but the French *émigrés* at the time of the Revolution, bringing with them their most precious and easily carried valuables, included numbers of piqué articles among them, so that Britain is peculiarly rich in its store of the commodity. Its production still continues, and the latter fact shows that the beautiful ware makes an appeal to present-day collectors, which must be far stronger than is generally realised, for they have received little or no assistance to encourage them in their hobby. Until Major Dent published his articles in *THE CONNOISSEUR*, which form the basis of the present work, the literature that existed on the subject was almost negligible. A few short references to it were concealed in encyclopædias and one or two technical works, but no serious attempt had been made either to give a history of the art or to form a record of its various manifestations. Moreover, piqué has been largely ignored by museum authorities. There is a certain number of pieces of it at South Kensington, but it is practically unrepresented at either the Louvre or the British Museum, and though odd examples of it may be found in other public institutions here and there, it cannot be said that there exists in any of them a systematically arranged collection which the amateur can consult for guidance.

Major Dent should, therefore, earn the gratitude and sympathy of collectors as an explorer on uncharted ground, the original landmarks of which he has had to rediscover for himself. He makes no pretence of literary craftsmanship, but writes solely from the standpoint of a collector, setting down plainly and straightforwardly the data that he has gained during the many years he has been engaged on his hobby. His book on "Piqué" is a much needed work, for it fills up a gap in our knowledge concerning a small but by no means negligible sphere of fine craftsmanship,—a sphere, moreover, which has been exploited by some of the most skilled workers during a long and great period of industrial art.



PLATE III.



LOUIS XIV., EARLY PERIOD.

PIQUÉ

A Beautiful Minor Art

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY NOTES.



ALTHOUGH, in one form or another, this beautiful method of decoration has been in vogue for nearly three hundred years, it is somewhat remarkable that no English encyclopædia, not even the latest edition of the "British," offers any description of, or has any reference to, piqué at all. Essentially a French art, however, we are naturally more fortunate in finding a description of piqué in Havard's *Dictionnaire de l'ameublement et de la décoration*, published in Paris about the middle of the eighteenth century:—"Piqué est un terme de tabléier; on appelle piqué d'or un genre de décoration qu'on fait subir surtout à l'écaille et qui consiste à piquer celle-ci d'une foule de petites pointes coupées juste au ras de l'écaille et polies avec elle, complétant d'une façon légère et charmante les dessins principaux. Le piqué d'or a été fort à la mode au siècle dernier. Nous relevons dans les annonces affiches et avis divers du 6 mai 1765 la note suivante: 'Le 29 avril on a perdu à la Comédie Française un sac de taffetas noir contenant un clef d'or, un petit étui d'écaille en piqué d'or et garnie.' " It will be noted that the term piqué is limited in this description to "petites points," but the London auctioneers and dealers not only include similar decoration in silver, but have extended the term piqué to "strip" decoration in silver and gold on ivory as well as tortoiseshell. I would suggest that a correct modern definition of piqué would be: "Gold or silver in point or strip, on either shell or ivory; and if mother-of-pearl be included as a very frequent added decoration, it would, with but few exceptions, cover all piqué work from the time of Louis XIII. to the present day." It is an interesting fact that piqué, be it French, English, Dutch, Spanish, German, or Italian, is true to itself during this long period of time, and with the few exceptions to be mentioned in a later chapter, on "Specimens allied to or in imitation of Piqué," answers to the

description above suggested. Very little piqué was produced—at least in the earlier days of the art—outside the ateliers of France and England, and the illustrations in the present volume will refer only to specimens made in those countries, but examples of German, Italian, and Spanish craftsmanship will be alluded to in the letterpress.

The reference in the *Dictionnaire de l'ameublement* to the lost piqué étui in 1765 is interesting, but the initial work in the art dates from at least a century and a half earlier; Charles André Boulle, therefore, must not have all the credit of "originating for the art-craftsmen of his time methods of working in tortoiseshell," for there is plenty of evidence that the art of moulding and working in this beautiful medium was thoroughly understood at least as early as the second decade of the seventeenth century, some fifty years before Charles André Boulle came to the fulness of his powers. It was not until 1672 that Boulle, at the age of thirty, on the recommendation of Colbert, took up his residence at the Louvre in the rooms allotted to him by Louis XIV.

Piqué work in its inception, artistic design, and detail being so typically French, one would have expected to find numerous specimens in the museums of Paris. As a matter of fact, they are particularly wanting in this respect. The Conservateur of the Louvre writes that he is unable to give any definite information about piqué, and states that the museum contains no specimens. At the Cluny also, and other Paris museums visited, not a single example was found. On further consideration, however, this absence is not so extraordinary, because by far the greater number of piqué articles were of small size, including snuff-boxes, étuis, bodkin cases, scent-bottles, small drinking cups, trays, bonbonnières, shuttles, fan-sticks, etc., and the probability is that such treasures would form part of the personal baggage of *émigrés* seeking refuge in times of political unrest, religious persecution, and national trouble. Of these small articles, snuff-boxes show distinctly the greater preponderance, for the practice of inhaling snuff was quite common on the Continent throughout the seventeenth century, was by no means a rare habit in England during this period, and throughout the eighteenth century was an universal custom.

It is remarkable that there are no specimens of piqué at the British Museum, and but a single piece (part of a toilet set, in piqué posé on blonde tortoiseshell) at the Wallace. At the Victoria and Albert, however, there is quite a fair collection, which has been added to recently. Of the examples at South Kensington, a doubt is in some cases expressed as to whether the work is of English or French origin. One can easily understand how difficult it is to label them with any great degree of accuracy, when it is remembered that at the time the art was at its highest development the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, in 1685, sent over to this country, among the forty thousand French families, a large number of craftsmen who brought with them the arts and industries of their native land, many workers in piqué being certainly included. These workers were naturally influenced by their environment, and in the process of years, but very gradually, they adopted the more crude and less

artistic designs of the English. Late seventeenth-century piqué articles may therefore well have been made in England by French workers, and be quite indistinguishable from French specimens of the same period made in France. But even as early as Queen Anne we find that environment has begun to tell, and the designs have to a certain extent lost their delicacy, and are of a somewhat cruder type. During the greater part of the eighteenth century most of the English specimens produced were of fine workmanship, and marked by excellent taste and suitability. As we approach early Victorian times, although the workmanship is still fine, the brooches, pendants, ear-rings, and necklets with which our grandmothers adorned themselves, were heavy and cumbrous, and, were it not that they fulfil our description of piqué, are scarcely worthy of being associated with the refined workmanship of the original French art. Some of the piqué articles made in England at the end of the seventeenth century represent Dutch scenes and characters, due to the development by Dutch craftsmen (who followed William III. to this country) of an art to a great extent new to them, but one they were ready enough to acquire from their French and English fellow-workers; the more so as they had been skilled moulders of horn for very many years, and could the more readily adapt themselves to working and inlaying media which required very similar treatment.

To the artistic French nation, however, must be given the whole credit for conceiving such a beautiful method of decoration as piqué, and this is borne out by negative evidence—(1) the absence of any English specimens prior to the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, with the single exception of the highly interesting, but not particularly artistic, circle decoration of the latter half of the seventeenth century; and (2) the absence of any mention of piqué, or methods of working in ivory or shell, in any book of reference other than of French origin.

Although by far the greater number of articles in piqué were of small size—and this is not to be wondered at, considering the value of the materials used—there are some notable exceptions: a pair of bellows, large jewel-boxes, and a spinning-wheel, are among the articles I have seen in private collections; but the most remarkable exception is a late Louis XIV. cabinet in my possession—a wonderful and unique work of art worthy of special description. It originally formed part of the collection of Sir Julian Goldsmid, and was purchased by him from the late Duke of Orleans. The cabinet and stand are made entirely of tortoiseshell, the interior fitted with six drawers and divisions enclosed by doors, each with two shaped panels; a shaped top with rising lid enclosing a recess, and two drawers below. The stand has triangular-shaped supports fitted with stretcher rail and shelf. The whole of the exterior of the cabinet and stand is beautifully enriched with a fine design of flowers, scrolls, and diaper ornament in gold piqué point and posé, freely interspersed with dancing figures, pastoral scenes, animals, masks, and other designs in engraved mother-of-pearl. The side and back panels are as lavishly decorated as those in the front. The height of the cabinet and stand is 4 ft. 2 in., and the extreme width 2 ft. 5 in. It is interesting to note that the upper cornice and dome have a particularly Chinese

suggestion about them; also, that monkeys in engraved mother-of-pearl and gold appear freely all over the cabinet. Now the artist, Claud Audran, a famous decorative painter, and keeper of the collections at the Luxembourg, was well known for his "chinoiserie and singeries"; also it is known that in 1708 Antoine Watteau was his assistant, and the designs in some of the panels of the cabinet are typically "Watteau" in character. It is therefore quite justifiable to assume that the door panels were designed by Watteau in the atelier of Audran, although this would date the work, or at least a portion of the cabinet, as very early eighteenth century, rather than late seventeenth century, at which period several experts have placed it. Such a piece of furniture, embracing so much wealth of detail, must obviously have been the work of many years. It is probable that its manufacture covers a period from about 1660 until the first decade of the eighteenth century, and this theory is fully confirmed by a careful study of the costumes and decoration of the panels, and the numerous vignettes with which the cabinet is so freely decorated. Mother-of-pearl is largely used to enhance the beauty of the piqué. In the cabinet above described there are more than four hundred plaques of finely engraved mother-of-pearl. In about one-third of all the piqué specimens I have seen, mother-of-pearl enters into the scheme, and greatly adds to the decorative effect. In the earlier purely French piqué, the added decoration was finely engraved, and in all seventeenth-century and eighteenth-century specimens this is the rule. In later work, the mother-of-pearl is often opalescent in colour, and but rarely engraved.

It would greatly aid in the classification of piqué if each period possessed definite features, but it is not to be expected that, because a new ruler came to the throne, an art would immediately alter its distinctive method of decoration to suit the convenience of collectors in a later age. We find, however, that the periods of Louis XIV., XV., and XVI., are marked quite as distinctly in the minor art of piqué as in the major art of furniture design. From an illustrative point of view, it will be better, in the first instance, to consider piqué decoration on tortoiseshell, leaving the ivory medium for a special chapter.

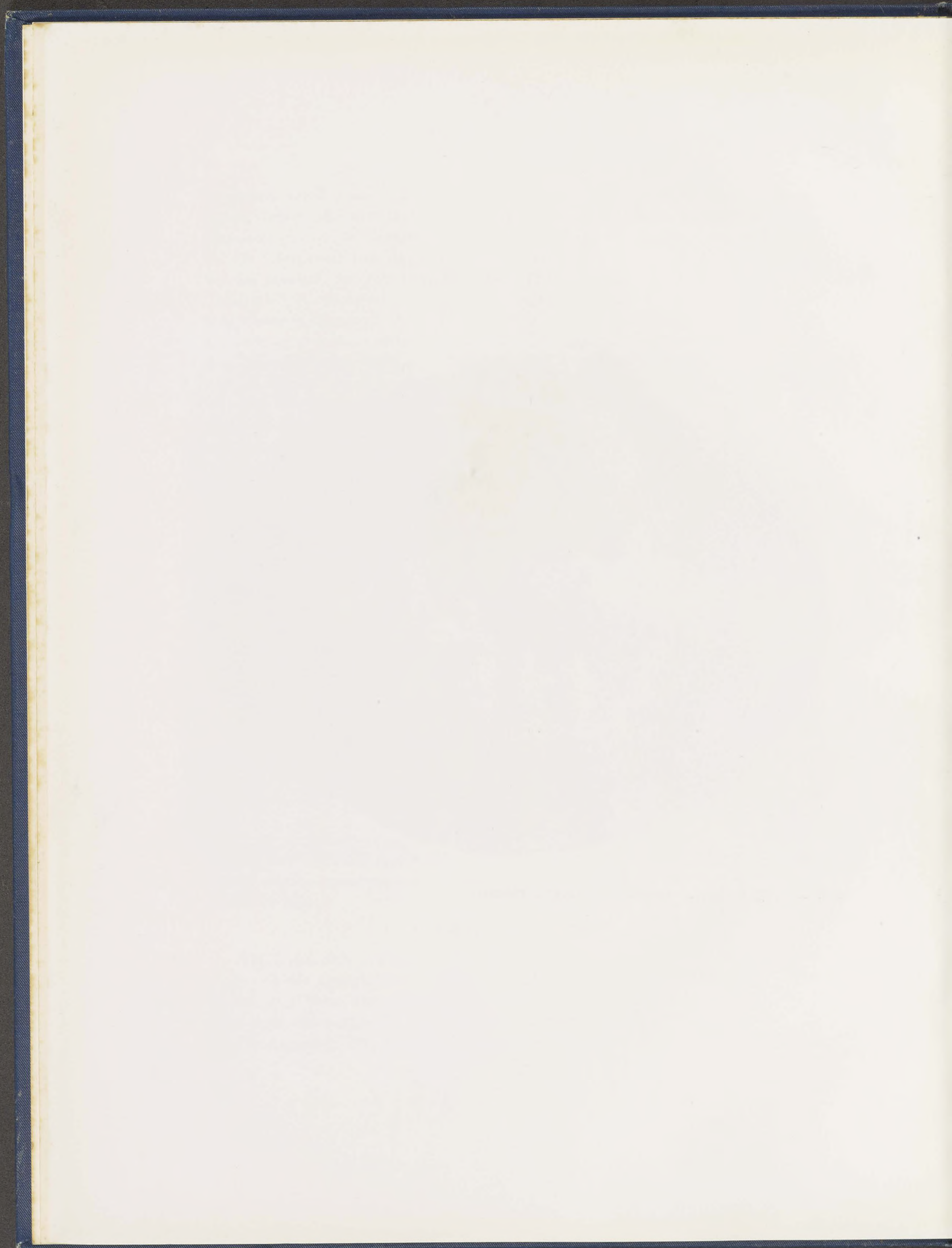
French piqué naturally divides itself into three periods—(a) Louis XIV., (b) Louis XV., and (c) Louis XVI., up to and including the Napoleonic era. English piqué can be more conveniently described as—(a) seventeenth-century, (b) eighteenth-century, and (c) nineteenth-century to the present day. The division into these periods may be considered somewhat arbitrary, but is the best working plan the author is able to offer.

LOUIS XIV. PERIOD.

The Louis XIV., in my opinion, is the most interesting period of the French piqué. Oddly enough, the very earliest specimens attain quite the high-water mark of the art. These early specimens of the period provide very little strip-work, or piqué posé, the designs being worked out almost entirely in "foules point d'or," the effect being greatly heightened in most cases by the addition of the larger "clous d'or."

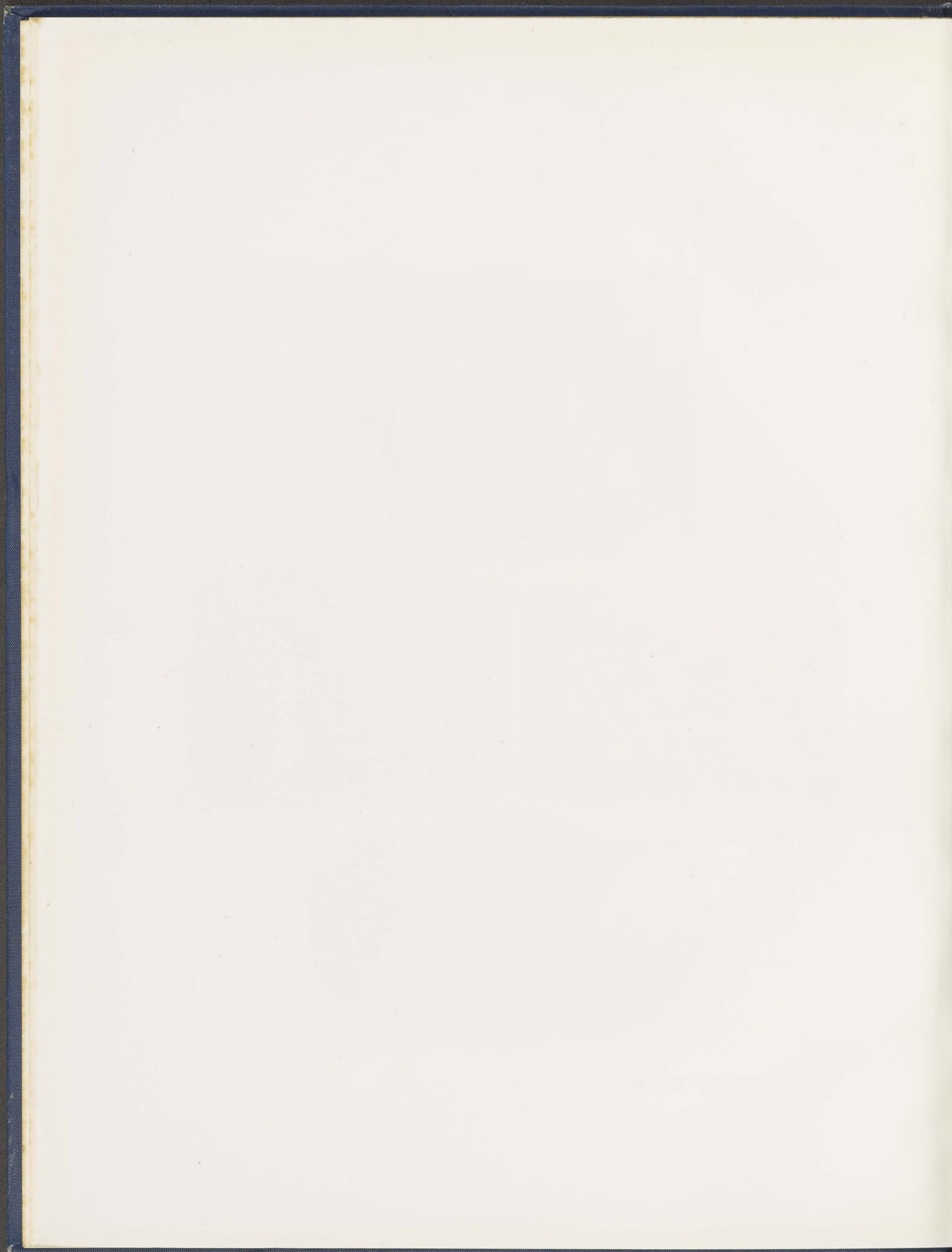


SHAPED PIQUÉ TRAY. LOUIS XIV., EARLY PERIOD.



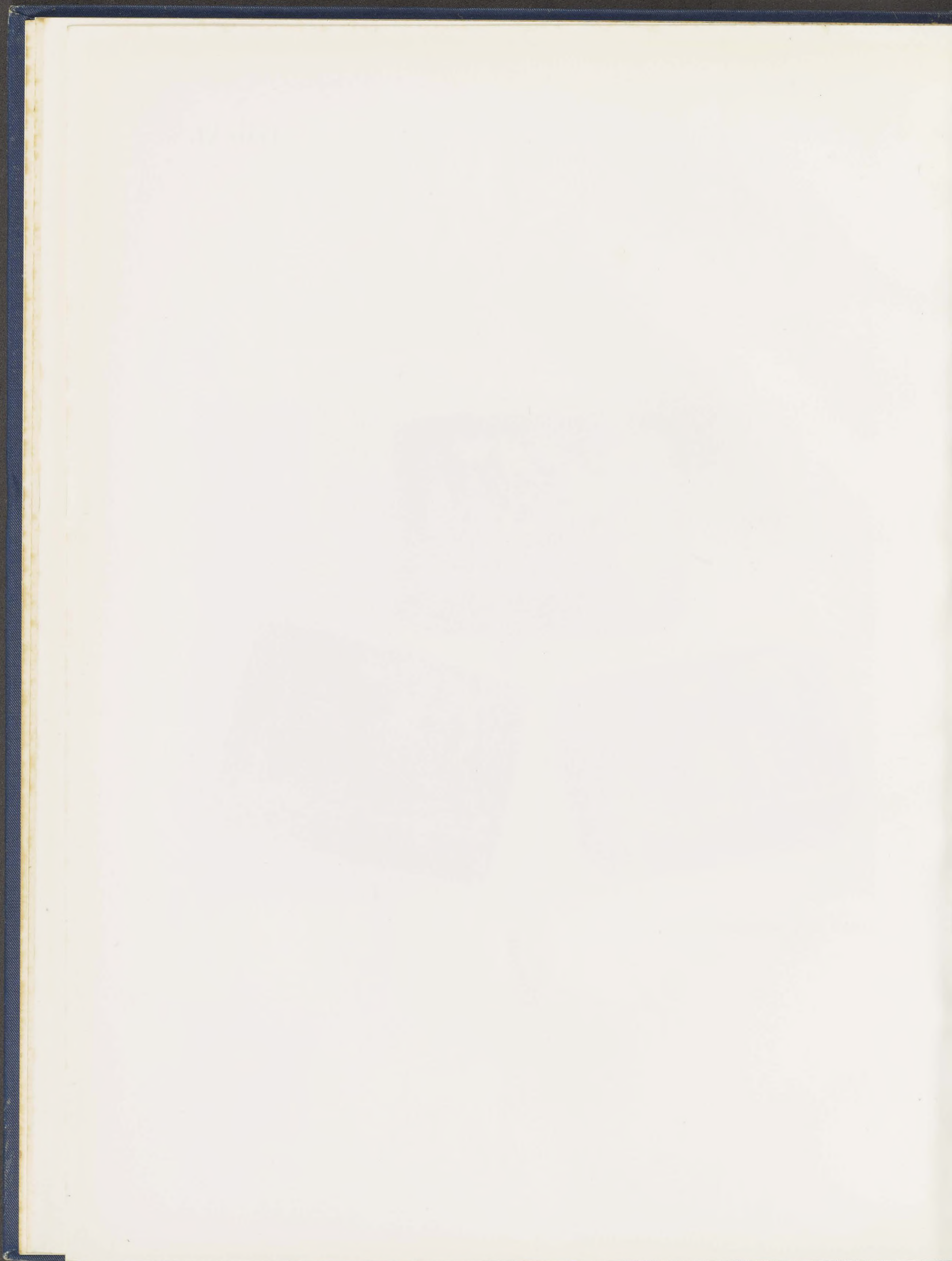


LOUIS XIV., EARLY PERIOD.



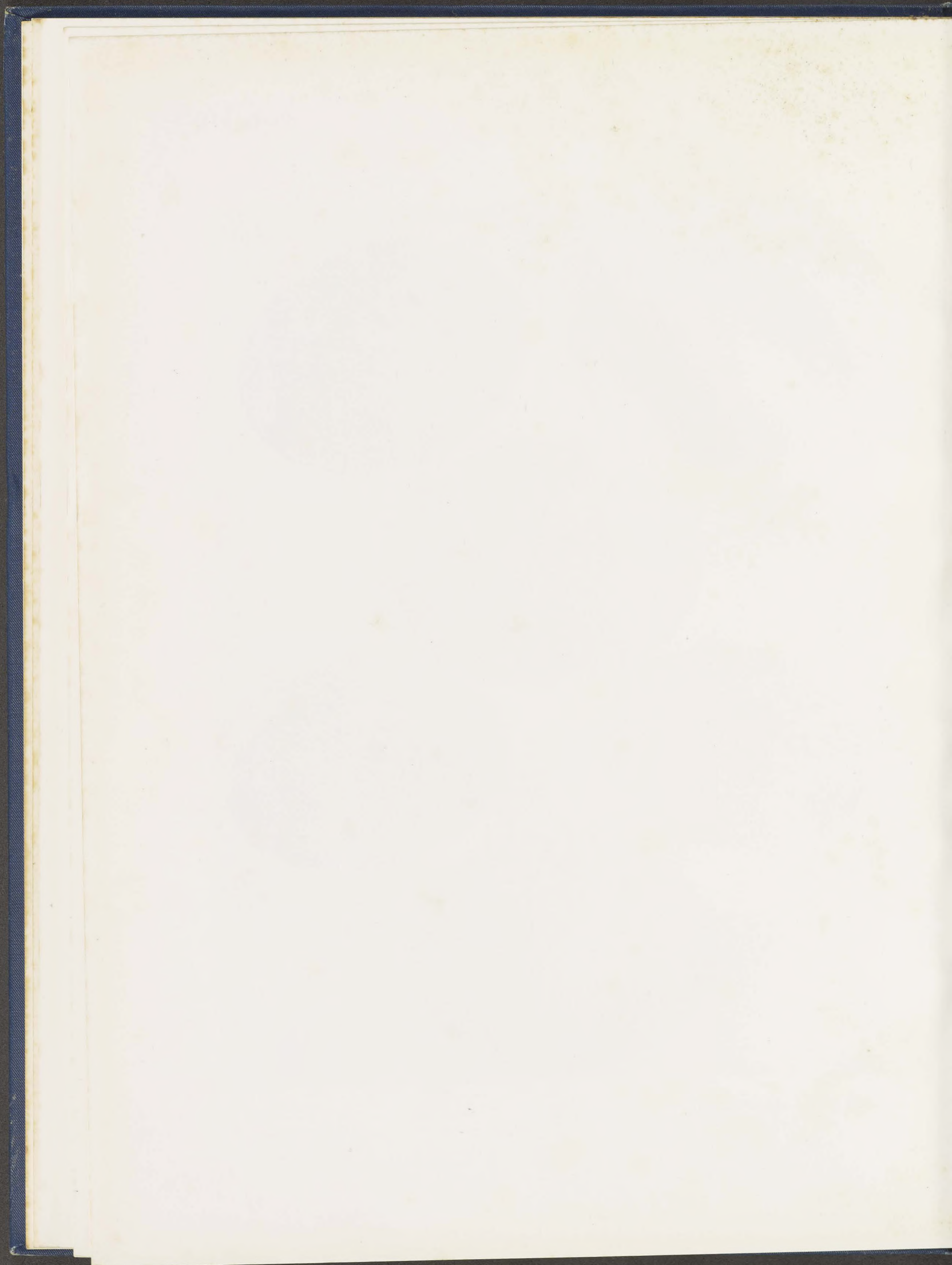


LOUIS XIV., MIDDLE PERIOD.





LOUIS XIV., LATE PERIOD.



In later examples piqué point is associated with piqué posé, and towards the end of the period examples occur either in pure piqué point or piqué posé, specimens in which the two methods of decoration are combined in the same work of art being distinguished by their rarity. In this period the points often resolve themselves into the form of the fleur-de-lys, flies, gnats, cornucopia, vine-leaves, grape clusters, quaint birds, and finally the sun-flower and the sun-bird (the peacock), emblematic of Louis XIV. "le Roi Soleil"; or again, may not present any of these special marks of the period, but form purely a conventional pattern, as shown in the fan-rays. The small drop hinge with the curved connecting bar on the inside of the lid is typical of the Louis XIV. period, and often serves, in conjunction with the shape of the specimen and the character of the decoration, to determine date of manufacture. As a general rule, the oblong, square, and shaped boxes of this period are of an earlier date than the oval ones. The vine-leaves, gnats, etc., although the special designs of this period, appear in early specimens of Louis XV., and I have even a Louis XVI. specimen, with the Paris mark of the Revolution year, where the gnats and vine-leaves appear; but in this last instance the piqué is of the finest posé variety, and the effect different to that of the early period now under consideration. It must always be borne in mind that when a particular design provided a pleasing effect, it was likely to be reproduced at a later date, and it is owing to this fact that we possess such beautiful English piqué work in the eighteenth century, when, in spite of the existence of much original home talent, the designers followed with such splendid success the style of earlier masters. Also it may be noted that the piqué posé toilet-table articles of to-day are a very good imitation of our own Adam style of a century and a half ago.

Before concluding these few general remarks on Louis XIV. piqué decoration, I should like to state that although the gnats, flies, vine-leaves, birds, etc., above mentioned constitute the special designs of the period as regards piqué, the ordinary designs found in Louis XIV. furniture are also in evidence. Thus the C-scrolling, the palmette, the shell, the lattice, and other well-known features of the period, will be perceived in several of the examples illustrated; but special weight is given to the characteristic details, such as the gnats, flies, etc., because they apply especially to piqué, and obviously could not enter into the scheme of furniture design.

It is altogether beyond the scope of this volume to describe in detail every specimen illustrated, but I would like to draw special attention to the three oblong snuff-boxes, representing the middle period of Louis XIV. It will be noted that in each case the subject is a classical one; also in each case the upper part of the decorative scheme is in piqué posé, and the lower portion in piqué point; and again that in each case this arrangement is repeated on the base of each specimen. One of these boxes was discovered in an Agra bazaar as far back as 1885, and may conceivably at one time have been in the possession of that great designer, Austin de Bordeaux, a French architect in the service of Shah Jehan, and thought by many to be the designer of that "glorious conception," the Taj of Agra; another I found in a marine

store in Quebec in 1910, once the property, probably, of some *émigré* forced to leave "la belle France" towards the end of the seventeenth century; and the third was but recently acquired in Bond Street. The price of the purchase in each instance, it may be added, increased in geometrical progression, but I was only too pleased to have the opportunity of bringing together from so many leagues apart specimens of a rare type of Louis XIV. piqué which obviously emanated from the same atelier, and were probably the work of the same master-hand.

Another notable specimen is the shaped tray, illustrating quite the earliest period of Louis XIV., or possibly late Louis XIII. This I believe to be the earliest piece of piqué in my collection, as it is undoubtedly the finest. Confirmatory evidence as to date of production is furnished by the costumes of the figures depicted in engraved mother-of-pearl. These costumes, it is interesting to note, correspond exactly to those in various thumb-nail prints in my possession by that great contemporary master engraver, Jean Jaques Callot (1592-1635).



CHAPTER II.

PIQUÉ NOMENCLATURE.

 BEFORE proceeding further to describe the various periods, I think it will be advisable to make a few remarks in general as to piqué decoration. In the catalogue description of piqué articles at different sales, one cannot help noticing how varied are the terms applied to the same designs by different experts, and one gets rather lost among such appellations as "Renaissance," "Arabesque," "Conventional," "Moresque," "Grotesque," and "Cinquecento." Perhaps the few following lines, gathered from various articles on decoration in the latest edition of the *British Encyclopædia*, may help to make the question of decorative nomenclature a little less confusing, and at the same time will serve to explain why confusion exists: "Arabesque is a word technically used for a certain form of design in flowing lines intertwined. In decorative design the term is, historically, a misnomer. It is applied to the grotesque decoration derived from Roman remains of the early time of the Empire, and not to any style derived from Arabian or Moorish work. Arabesque and Moresque are really distinct. The latter is from the Arabian style of ornament developed by the Byzantine Greeks for their new masters, after the conquest of the followers of Mahomet; and the former is a term pretty well restricted to varieties of cinquecento decoration which have nothing in common with any Arabian examples in their details, but are a development derived from Greek and Roman grotesque designs. Cinquecento in architecture, the style which became prevalent in Italy in the century following 1500, now usually called sixteenth-century work, was the result of the revival of classic architecture known as the Renaissance. What really took place in the Italian revival was in some measure a supplanting of the 'Arabesque' for the classical 'Grotesque,' still retaining the original Arabian designation, while the genuine Arabian art, the Saracenic, was distinguished as Moresque; so it is now the original Arabesque which is called by the specific name of Saracenic and Moresque, while the term Arabesque is applied exclusively to the style developed from the classical 'Grotesque' of the Roman Empire. There is still, however, much of the genuine Saracenic element in Renaissance Arabesques, the details of which consist largely of the 'Conventional' 'Saracenic' foliations. But the Arabesque developed in the Italian cinquecento work repudiated all the original Arabian devices, and limited itself to the manipulating of the classical elements, of which the most pronounced feature is ever the floriated, or foliated scroll, and it is in this cinquecento decoration that Arabesque has been perfected."

The above excerpts apply primarily to architecture and sculpture, but are equally applicable to the minor art of piqué, and I think it will be agreed that they fully explain the difficulty of nomenclature in piqué design. I have referred to the terms used in the description of piqué somewhat *in extenso*, because piqué is a most conservative art, not only as regards the methods of preparation of the media—tortoiseshell and ivory—but also in decoration, for the “Arabesque,” “Conventional,” “Moresque,” and “Renaissance” patterns (with naturally some new departures due to the rise of fresh masters of design) are traceable through the whole of the long period through which it is proposed to follow the art, and the author feels sure there will be plenty of evidence in this direction if the illustrations are carefully studied. As a musical friend of his remarked: “The influence of the Renaissance motif is easily discernible through all the acts of the piqué opera.”

LOUIS XV. PERIOD.

In furniture design the period of Louis XV. has been somewhat condemned for over-elaboration; but in regard to the delicate art of piqué, over-elaboration is scarcely possible, particularly as the inlay work, with but very few exceptions, is presented on a flat surface. Although, in the author's opinion, the piqué work of this period is not so fascinating as that of Louis XIV., there are some remarkably fine specimens. Most of the piqué is of the *posé* order, with only minor details in point, in many of the examples. Pure point piqué in this period is distinctly the exception, but as we shall see later, the pure point again revives in the latter years of Louis XVI., and later again is much in evidence, particularly in specimens of the ivory medium in the early years of the second Empire. The prevailing decoration of the Louis XVI. period takes the form of the C-scroll. As we have seen, the C-scroll was already in evidence in the latter years of Louis XIV., but attained its highest development as the single scroll, double C, and treble C-scroll in the period under review. The diaper, or lattice design, is also a favourite one of this period. As we have seen, it is found in the later specimens of Louis XIV. piqué, but became much more in vogue in the time of Louis XV. This is due to the fact that, although the lattice, with other Renaissance designs derived from the Saracenic, appeared in the time of Louis XIV., this particular pattern received a special stimulus in the succeeding reign, because European art was then beginning to be affected by the designs on the lacquer screens, cabinets, and other Eastern works of art brought over by the traders of the East India Company, and among these the lattice or diaper takes a prominent position.

In a comparatively small number of specimens of Louis XV. piqué *posé*, the silver or gold was pressed home on a pattern previously embossed, a tendency suggestive of the over-elaboration of the furniture of the period. Personally, I do not think the artistic effect of this type of embossed piqué is so pleasing as the ordinary form, and I imagine this must have been the general impression, as it did not appear until the period under review—is uncommon even in that period—and I have not

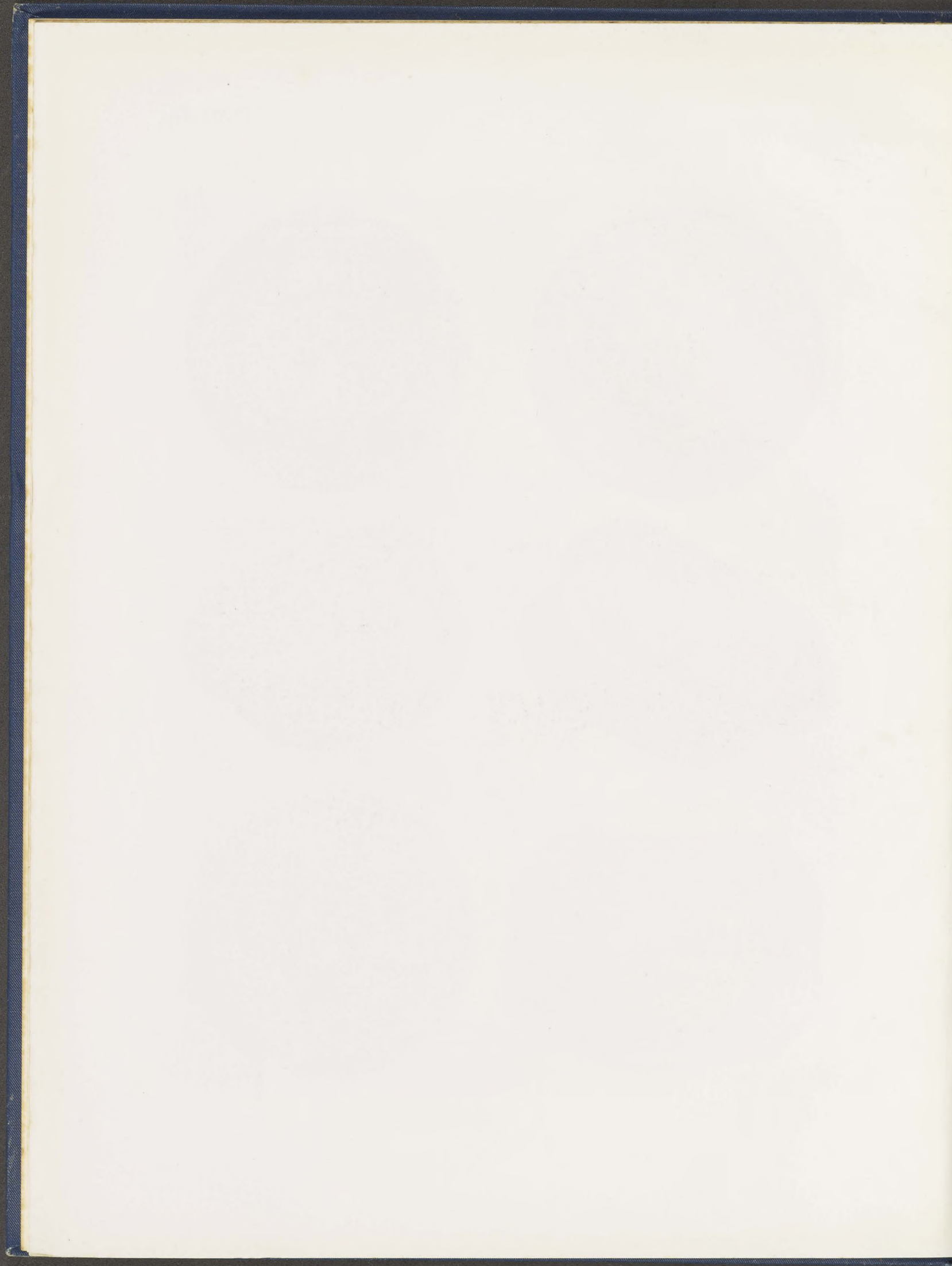


LOUIS XV. PERIOD.



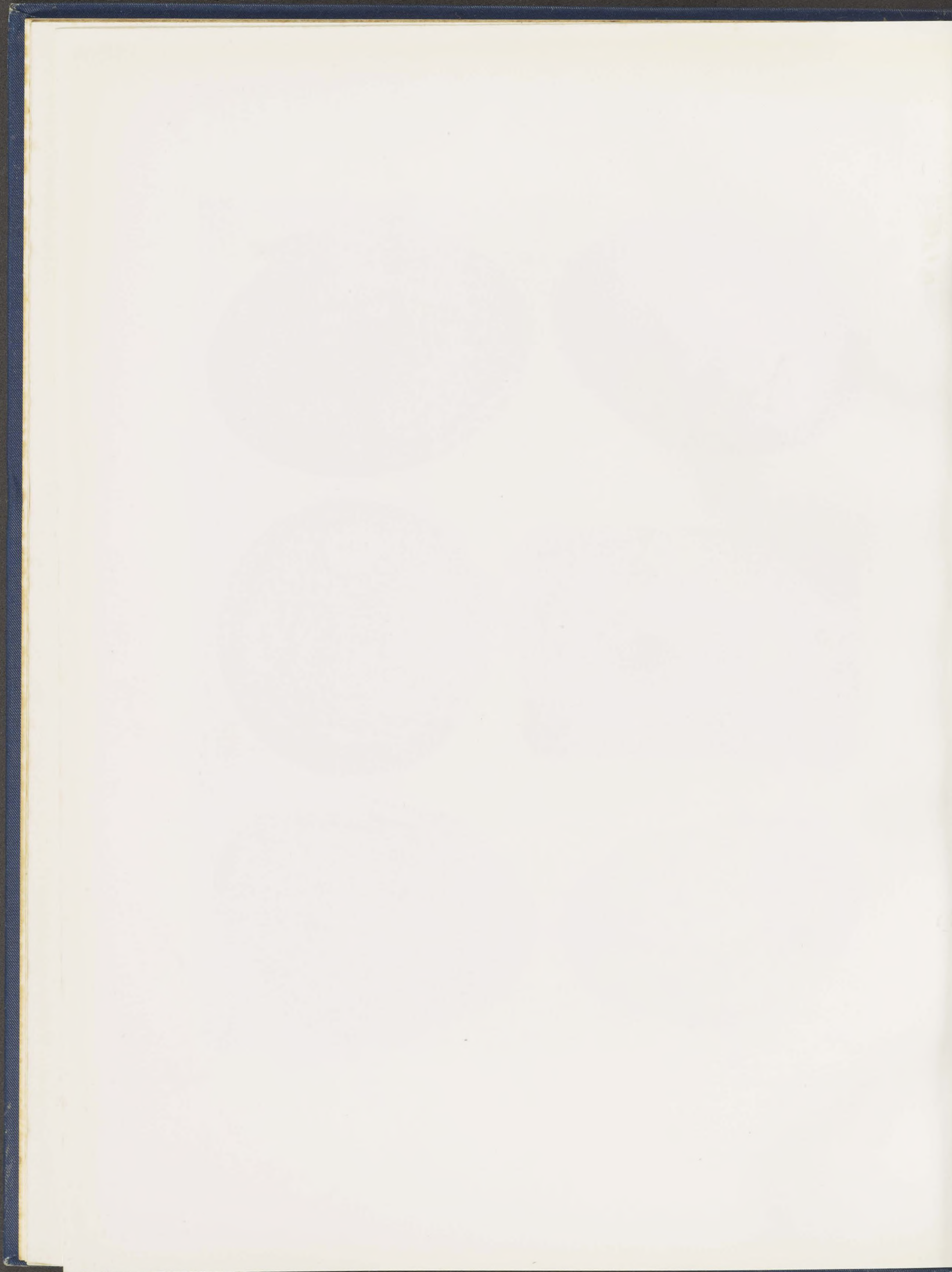


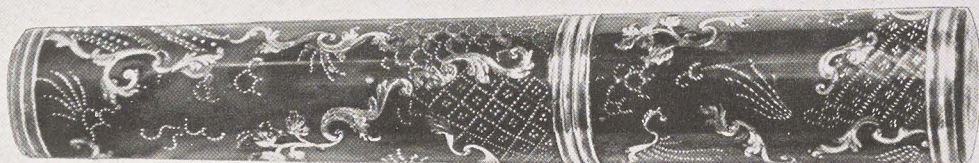
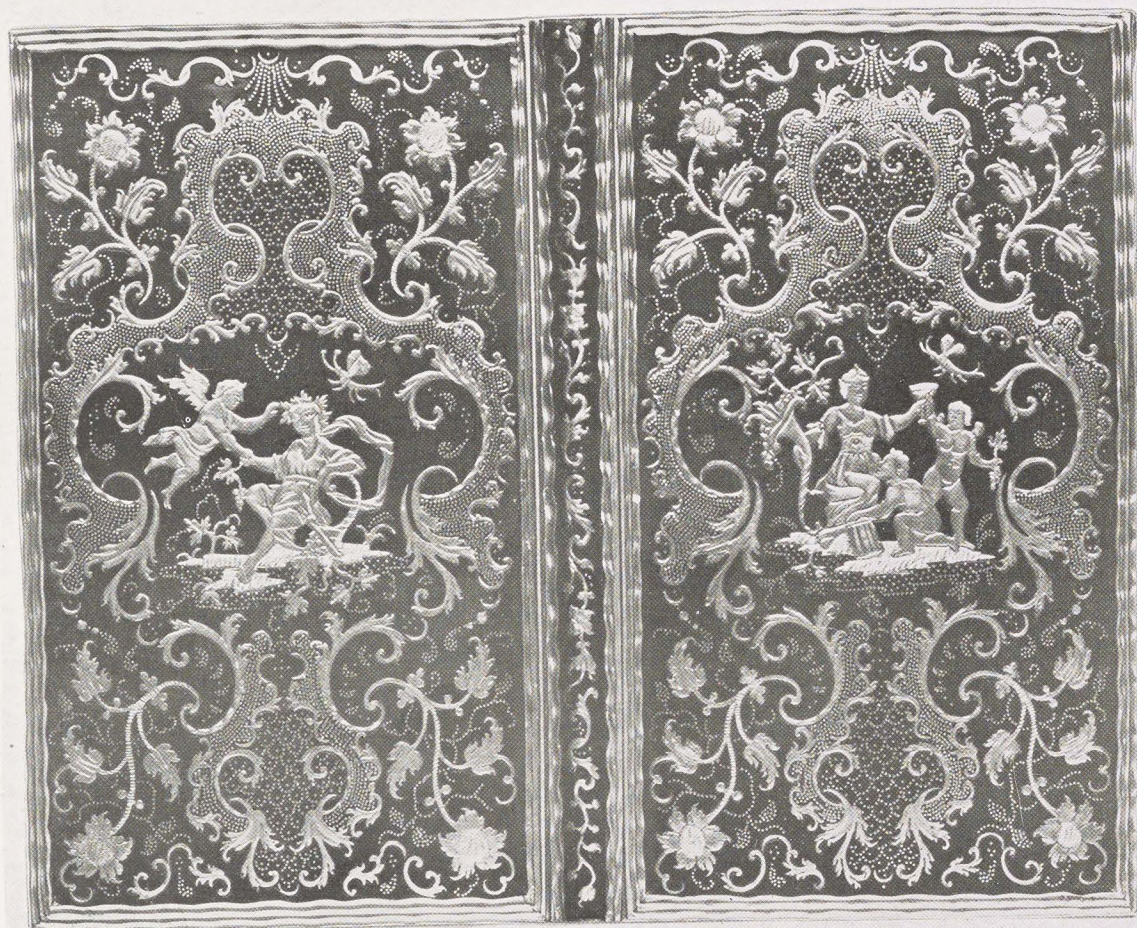
LOUIS XV. PERIOD.





LOUIS XV. PERIOD.





LOUIS XV., EARLY PERIOD.

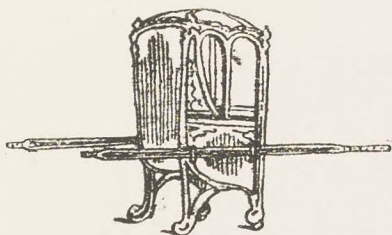


come across a single specimen of later date (Plate IX.). These specimens came from the Blumenthal collection.

Many of the snuff-boxes of this period present the classical figures of Corydon and Phyllis, the allegorical shepherd and shepherdess, the former with his lute, and the latter with her crook, and, in most instances, a classic ruin is depicted in the background (Plate X.). A more ambitious effort is in some cases made where further figures are introduced, showing the influence the great painters of the day, Watteau and Lancret, by their portrayal of the pastoral scene and the *fête-champêtre*, must have had upon the piqué craftsmen of their time.

The majority of the piqué specimens of this date still consist of snuff-boxes, but articles associated with a more luxurious age naturally come into evidence, and therefore such trifles as bonbonnières, scent-bottles, salve and powder boxes, are frequently to be met with.

In concluding these notes on the piqué of Louis XV., I would draw special attention to the upper four snuff-boxes (Plate VIII.), illustrative of the early period of the reign. They were contained in a Boulle box—1715 to 1720 period—especially fitted for cards, counters, and four snuff-boxes. It will be noticed that each box represents a suit of a pack of cards, and the gold piqué posé decoration on each presents a scene depicting figuratively the suit for which it stands. As one would expect, the piqué decoration marks the transition period between Louis XIV. and Louis XV., the former being represented by the drop hinge, the quaint birds and gnats, and the latter by the C-scrolling, the shape and character of the box, and the firm establishment of the lattice design. The beautiful diary and bodkin case (Plate XI.) also belong to this transition period.



CHAPTER III.

LOUIS XVI. PERIOD, UP TO AND INCLUDING THE SECOND EMPIRE AND FIRST ENGLISH PERIOD.



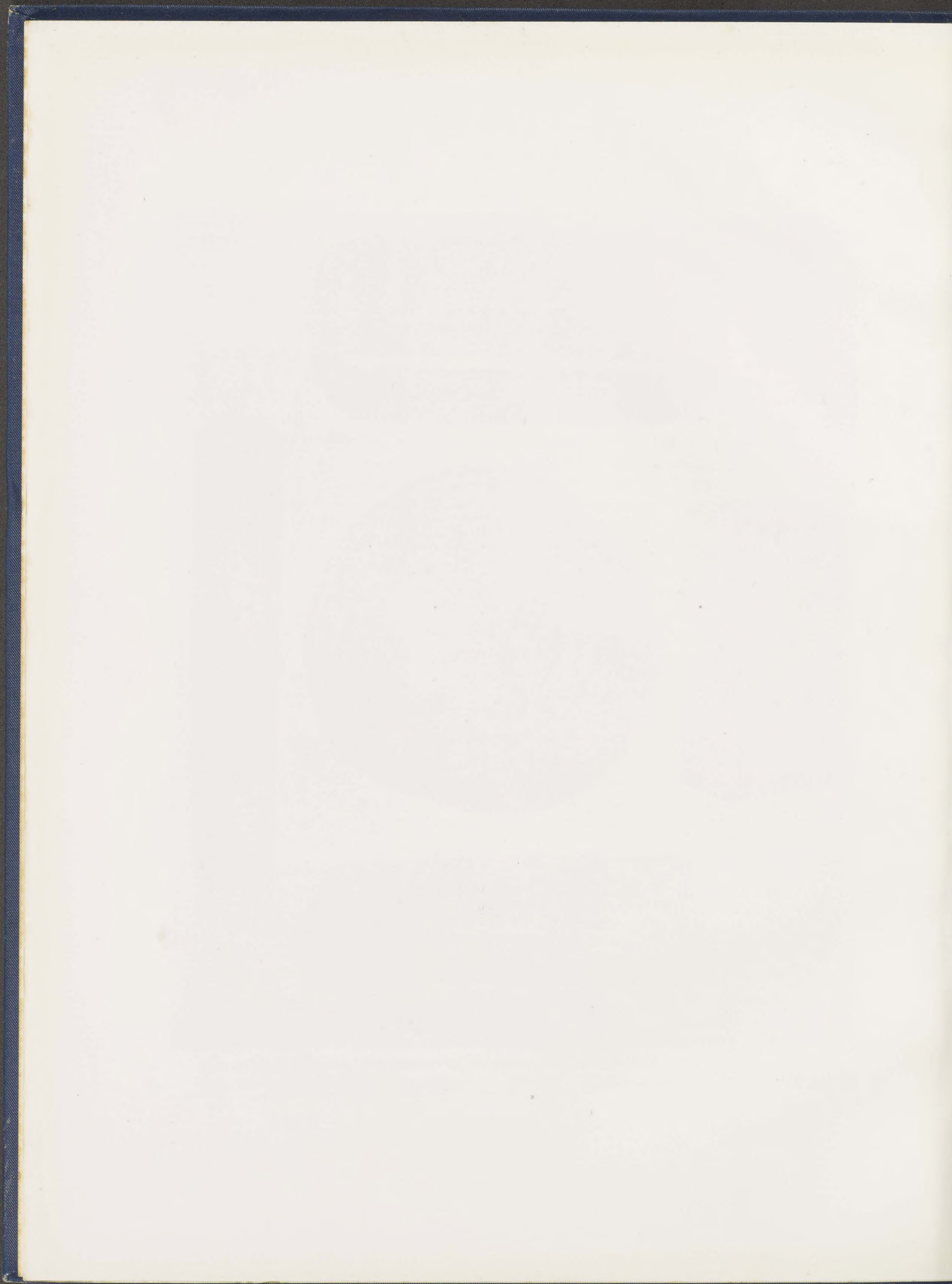
THE most characteristic decoration of this period is the star. As far as I am aware, the star does not occur in any specimen of the Louis XIV. or Louis XV. periods. It is quite rare in English specimens, and even then is limited to a few piqué articles made in the early nineteenth century. Most certainly, as a method of decoration, the star originated with the French. The corbeille of flowers, which appears but rarely as a design in the time of Louis XIV. and Louis XV., is quite common throughout the whole period under review. Another favourite is a sprig pattern, possibly intended to represent a pimpernel, and it is often associated with the star and a small double circle, as will be seen in several of the specimens illustrating the period. I had thought it possible that the little flower referred to, which appears in so many pieces of Louis XVI. piqué, might have been the representation of some special Royalist badge associated with the revolutionary period. I wrote, therefore, to the Baroness Orczy to discover whether there was any historical foundation for the adoption of the "Scarlet Pimpernel" as a royal emblem. In reply I received a most charming letter, informing me that the idea of the "Scarlet Pimpernel" was entirely her own. The coincidence is, however, strange. Conceivably such an emblem did exist among those faithful to the fortunes of Louis XVI., just as at a later date the violet was the badge of recognition among the followers of the great Napoleon. A psychic might suggest that the gifted authoress had been impressed to adopt the "Scarlet Pimpernel" as the title of her brilliant novel, and had thereby unwittingly reaffirmed a definite historical fact, although she had supposed the attractive emblem to be the product of her own fertile imagination.

It is worthy of notice that the circle, single as well as double, never appears in French piqué prior to the time of Louis XVI., whereas, as we shall see later, it was practically the solitary method of decoration of all English piqué of the seventeenth century.

A very fine piqué posé, almost as fine as strands of hair, is found for the first time (in French piqué) in the latter part of the period under consideration, and although the French work is by far the more artistic, the idea of this special differentiation of piqué posé seems to have been borrowed from the English, for, as we shall note later in the chapter on "Eighteenth-century English Piqué," similar work of a cruder character was manufactured in England about 1740. The circular box inlaid with gold, portraying the emblem of the Revolution (Plate XII.), constitutes a remarkably fine specimen of this particular type of work. This box has the Paris gold mark

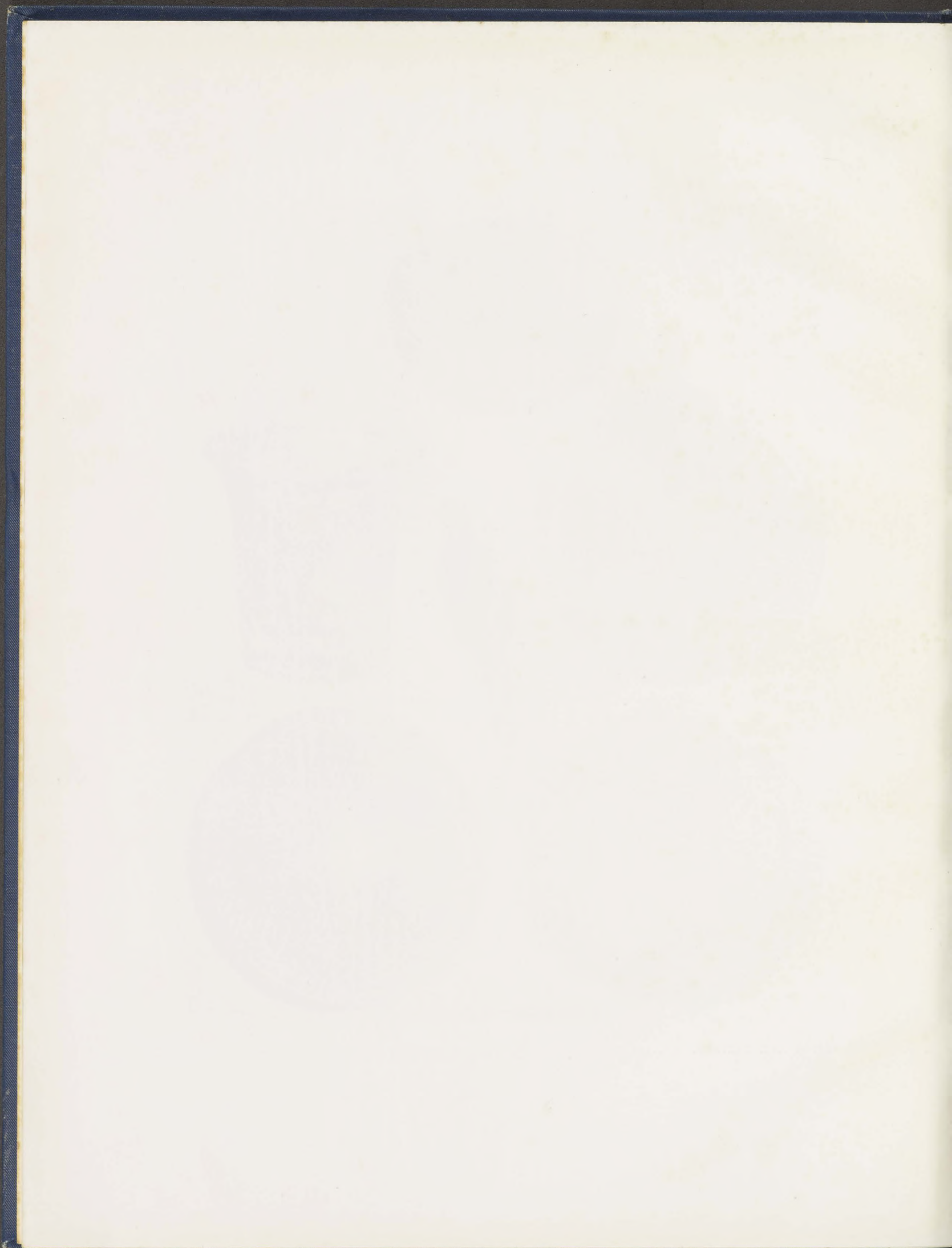


LOUIS XVI. PERIOD.





LOUIS XVI. PERIOD.



of the Revolution year, and is partly decorated in brilliant point, and partly in the special hair-work referred to.

Most of the work of the latter period of Louis XVI. and the Napoleonic era was on the ivory medium rather than on shell, and will be referred to in the chapter devoted to "Piqué on the Ivory Medium."

FIRST ENGLISH PERIOD
(SEVENTEENTH CENTURY).

For all practical purposes, the one decorative effect of this period of English piqué is the single circle, for it was not until quite the end of the seventeenth century that birds, flowers, and other designs came to be associated with the circle as a form of decoration of English work.

How far back in the annals of time does the circle date as a method of decoration? In Whyte-Melville's *Sarchedon* one recalls the description of the adornments of Assarac, the High Priest of Baal, in the time of the great Assyrian queen Semiramis, who lived in Babylon about 800 B.C.:—"On his solid earrings, on his golden bracelets, on the fillet that bound his forehead, on the very clasps that secured his sandals, was graven the mystic circle, that constituted a memorial and a symbol of fate, omnipotence, and eternity; nor could his religion find a better emblem than that geometrical figure which has neither beginning nor end." It may be argued that *Sarchedon* is but a romance, and that the author of this famous classic was drawing upon his imagination. As a matter of fact, however, Whyte-Melville was much too true an artist to be inaccurate (even as regards detail of personal adornment) in respect of the period which he was describing, and antiquarian evidence abundantly proves him to have been entirely correct. Some years ago, when wandering through the "mummy" room of the British Museum, I was interested to find on the arms (in the form of asps) of a chair representing the Royal Throne of Hatshepsu, Queen of Egypt (eighteenth dynasty, 1500 B.C.), small metal circles inlaid in the wood in branching design. If not true piqué, at least it closely approximates to the purely English work of the seventeenth century, and lends to the art the distinction and the dignity of age.

Most of the piqué articles of this period consist of tobacco-boxes, but stick-heads (and these fortunately often dated) are not uncommon. More rare are bodkin-cases and diaries, and towards the end of the period watch-cases occur with piqué decoration; but the last, in addition to the circle, have in most instances bird and flower designs to add to the decorative effect. English tortoiseshell tobacco-boxes of the seventeenth century were always of liberal size and uniform shape, being oval, with flattened tops and fluted sides and bases. The small piqué silver circles are usually arranged round the periphery of the lid in pyramidal form. In the case of the earliest boxes (*temp.* Charles I.), the pyramid consists of but two tiers, but in the later Stuart boxes the pyramid is made up of three tiers. In the earlier boxes additional circle decoration may be found in radiating lines on the base of the box; at least, this is the case in the Charles I. box illustrated, and was also to be noted

in one of similar date belonging to another collector. In both of these Charles I. specimens a good many of the circles have worn away, or have dropped out owing to friction and the wear and tear associated with their great age. The circle as a decoration in English piqué practically disappears with the seventeenth century. The stick-head, to be illustrated in the subsequent chapter on "Pique on the Ivory Medium," and dated 1703, is the latest specimen of the circle in the writer's possession.

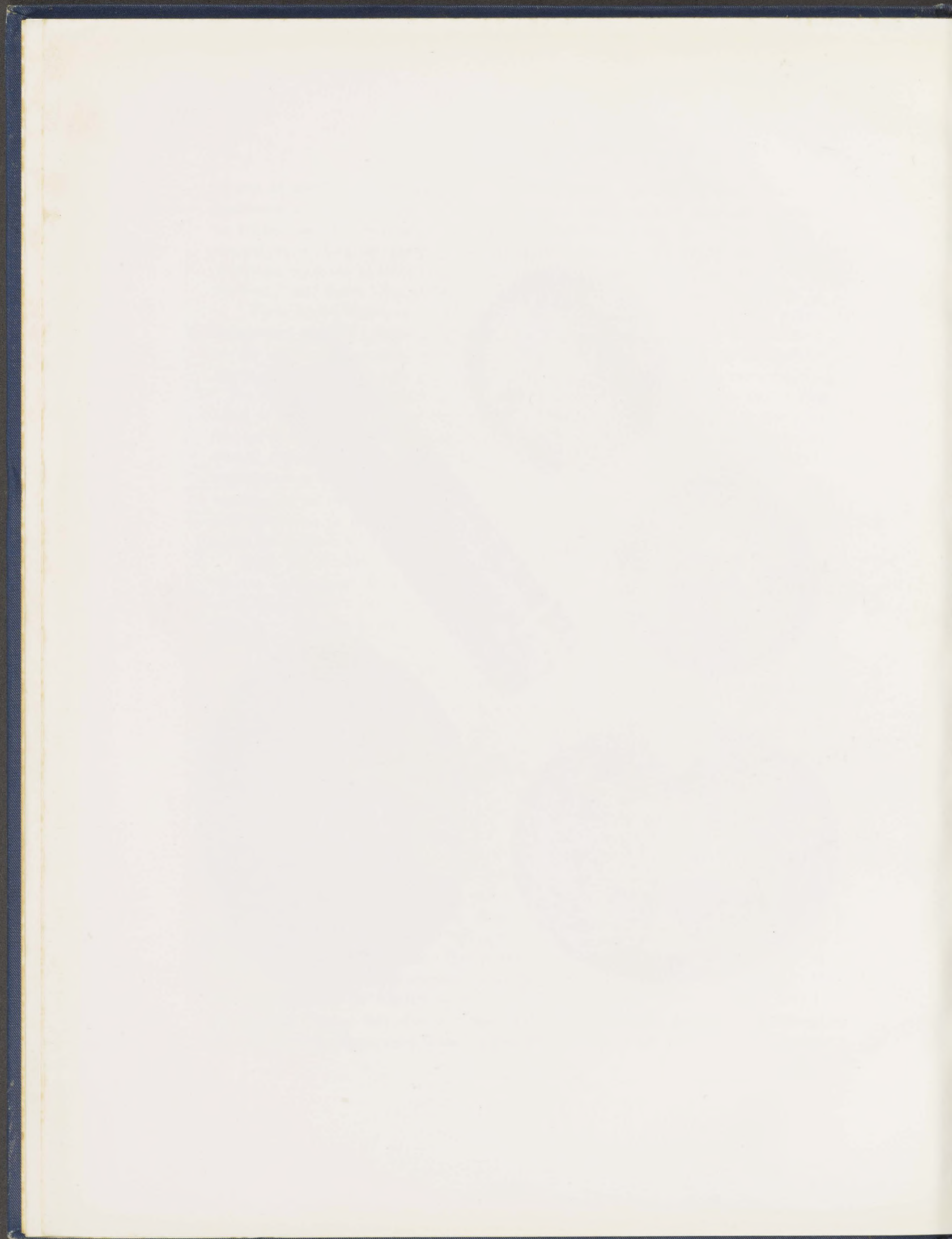
These Stuart boxes, as already mentioned, were made as receptacles for tobacco as opposed to snuff, because snuff-taking was a distinctly rare habit in England prior to the eighteenth century, whereas smoking tobacco had been a well-established practice for a long period. In this connection the following note is interesting:—"The battle of Vigo Bay, fought in 1702, led to the adoption of the snuff-taking habit in this country. After defeating the combined French and Spanish fleets, Sir George Rooke, the English Commander, sacked the town of Vigo, the booty including several thousand barrels of the finest snuff. Although smoking was then firmly established in England, snuff was almost unknown; but when this enormous quantity was thrown on the market at a low price, it was bought out of curiosity by all sorts and conditions of men. The novelty caught on so well that for the next hundred years the English snuffed far more tobacco than they smoked."

With the incidence of the eighteenth century, these large tortoiseshell boxes for tobacco disappeared, horn boxes and Dutch brass and copper boxes replacing them; while tortoiseshell boxes of much smaller calibre, modelled on the prevailing French pattern, were made as snuff receptacles to meet the rapidly increasing demand from the time of Queen Anne, and extending throughout the Georgian period.

I should like to refer particularly to two specimens illustrating this period. The Stuart tobacco-box (Plate XV.) with the initials I.P. is dated on the base 1708. Obviously this date was added when it passed into the possession of I.P. Under these initials can be distinctly seen with a powerful glass the royal cypher J.R., and the probability is that it was James II.'s own tobacco-box, and was presented by him to one of the Pole family who accompanied him to France on his abdication, the date and initials being added when it came into possession of yet another member of the Catholic family, some years after the death of the king. The second item calling for special reference is the diary on Plate XV. This beautiful specimen came from Walsingham Abbey. It is of particular interest because of the contained notes—quotations from Congreve: "Music hath charms to soothe the savage breast," in the scratch letter-writing of the period, and the references to Mary Milles and Margaret. With regard to these names, Lady Eustace Gurney (a member of the Lee-Warner family, to whom the abbey has belonged since Stuart times) has most kindly given me much helpful information. The names are those of her ancestors who lived at the end of the seventeenth century. The portrait of the Mary Milles referred to in the diary, painted by Kneller, is still a family possession. The interesting details which Lady Gurney was able to supply, taken together, quite establish the date of the diary as late Stuart, even if the typical decoration were not sufficiently convincing.



ENGLISH, SEVENTEENTH CENTURY.





ENGLISH, SEVENTEENTH CENTURY.



CHAPTER IV.

SECOND ENGLISH PERIOD, EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.

N spite of the caustic opinion of Carlyle in regard to the eighteenth century, art at least owes it a tremendous debt of gratitude, for as it was the "golden age" for architecture, furniture design, glass, silver, plating and enamelling, so also we shall see that English piqué reached in this period its highest development. Various factors contributed to this result. In the first place, the reversal of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 had the effect of sending over to this country some forty thousand families of Huguenot craftsmen; secondly, the arrival also of many Dutch craftsmen, for Dutch artisans already patronised by Charles II. came over to this country in even greater numbers when a king of their own nationality sat on the English throne; and thirdly, the native genius of successive masters of design in the persons of Chippendale, the brothers Adam, Hepplewhite, and Sheraton. The French influence in architecture, furniture design, and the minor arts throughout the eighteenth century can hardly be exaggerated. As an instance of this tendency through the eighteenth century to follow French fashions, it is interesting to note, if the illustrations of the period are studied, that at least three of the specimens (undoubtedly of English workmanship) are inscribed with names or mottoes in the French language (Plates XIX. and XX.).

Among the Dutch craftsmen who came to England about the time of Charles II. was Grinling Gibbons. He was discovered by the diarist Evelyn, and by him brought to the notice of the king. The greatest "master-carver that the world had in any age" derived his inspiration purely from Italian sources. He accomplished a vast amount of work during four reigns, living till 1721, and at that time occupied the position of master-carver to George I. This great artist naturally influenced minor kindred arts of his day, and in several piqué examples of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries the inspiration derived from Grinling Gibbons is manifested by the introduction of his favourite designs—the cherub heads, the caryatids, birds, and festoons of flowers (Plate XVI.). Some piqué point-work is to be noted in the diary cover illustrated (Plate XVI.), but the occurrence of point-work in English piqué is in the writer's opinion quite exceptional. Indeed, the delicacy of the workmanship and the presence of point-work in this specimen suggest that the craftsman responsible for its production was a French artist, but lately arrived from France, yet one who had been sufficiently long in this country to feel the influence

of Gibbons, for this particular production, with its festoons, birds, and caryatids, markedly emphasises the Florentine manner of the great master-carver.

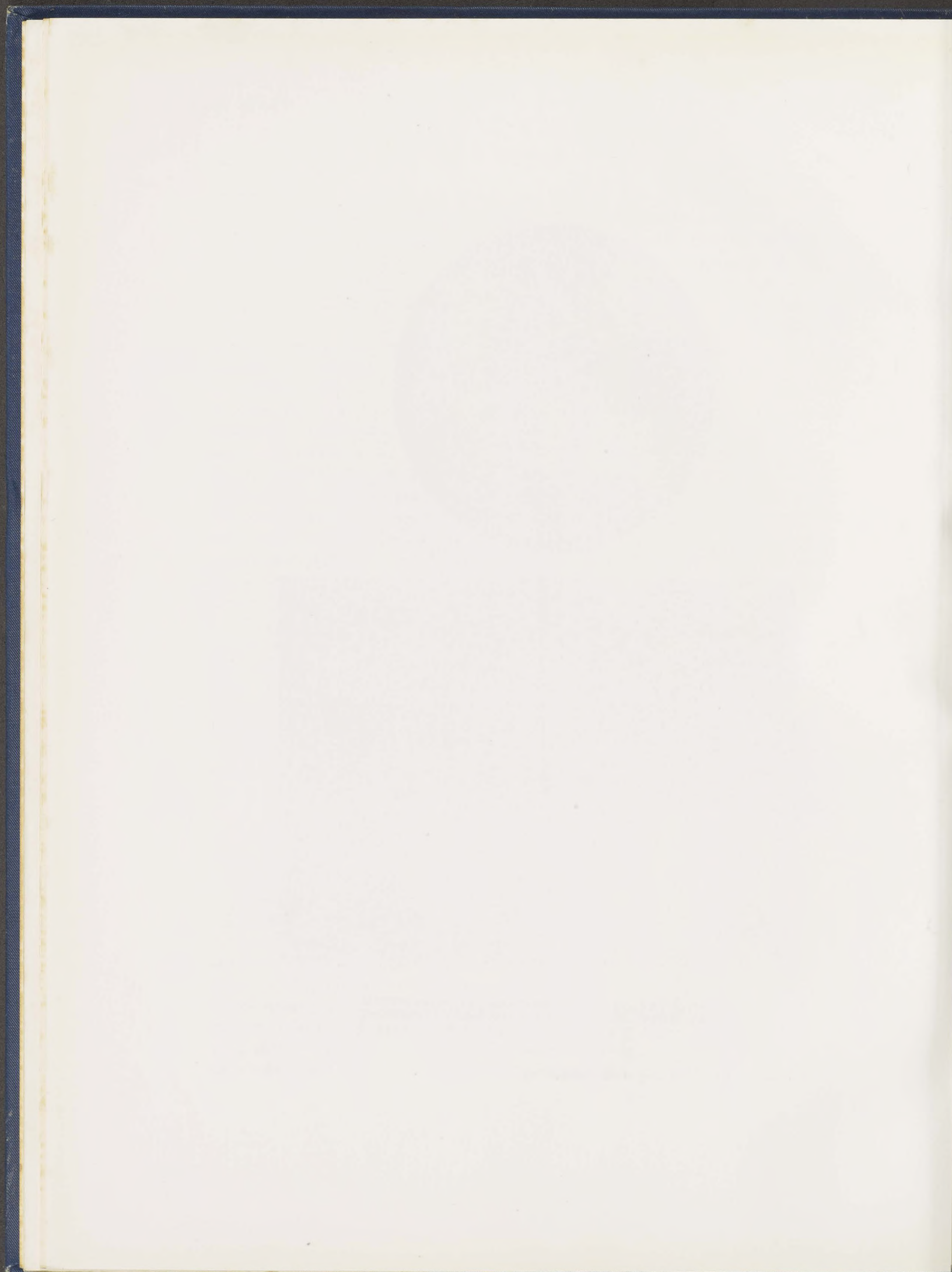
Between 1685 and the beginning of the eighteenth century it would probably be impossible to differentiate between boxes made in France and those made by French workers in the country of their adoption; but about the time Queen Anne came to the throne a definite type arose, lacking the delicacy of purely French work, possessing the cruder English stamp, and yet in most cases presenting some French suggestion: in one example, the fleur-de-lys; in another, a typical French figure; and in yet another, one or more of the designs already referred to, associated with the late Louis XIV. period. Dutchmen who had come over with William of Orange, and to whom horn-work was quite familiar, now seem to have adopted the more pleasing tortoiseshell as a medium for their craft, and therefore Dutch figures and scenes are also to be found in the earliest phase of eighteenth-century English piqué. Later again, as will be seen in the series shown in the illustrations of these early English snuff-boxes of the eighteenth century (Plates XVII. and XVIII.), the effect of the Oriental designs is very noticeable. The shape of by far the greater number of these early boxes was oval, with generally a projecting pin-hinge, and in nearly every case mother-of-pearl is to be noticed as an additional decoration. The writer has, as far as possible, arranged this series according to date of production, and it probably covers a period from the end of the seventeenth century to about 1730.

English piqué probably attained its highest perfection about 1740 to 1760. Chippendale was at this time producing his finest work, and obviously had a great influence on the piqué of this period. An excellent design for a ribbon-back chair is at once perceived in the piqué work on either of the charming spectacle-cases (Plate XIX.), which were acquired when the famous Hilton Price collection was dispersed. Also about this same period—1740 to 1760—first appeared a particular form of piqué posé consisting of fine silver strands (Plate XX.). The result was rather sketchy in character, and specimens of this kind of work are few, probably due to the fact that the effect was not so pleasing as the posé work with the broader band. A French box with the Paris mark of the Revolution year has already been referred to. Here the work is in fine strands of gold, and has a much more artistic effect. Possibly the French craftsman borrowed the English idea, and improved upon it; or its inception may have been a case of mere coincidence.

About this same time were produced circular snuff-boxes with Sheffield-plate bodies (Plate XXI.), the bases being of engine-turned tortoiseshell, and the lids, also of shell, piquéd in many cases with narrow strip silver in wreathed designs, giving in some instances a somewhat cloisonné effect. Oddly enough, I have in my possession a similar Sheffield-plate circular box, with base corresponding exactly in its engine-turned pattern to a piqué box in the series referred to (Plate XXI.); but the lid in this instance possesses no piqué, and consists only of a fine Battersea enamel of about 1755 date. I particularly mention this because it affords contributory evidence, if such were needed, as to the date of this particular class of work.

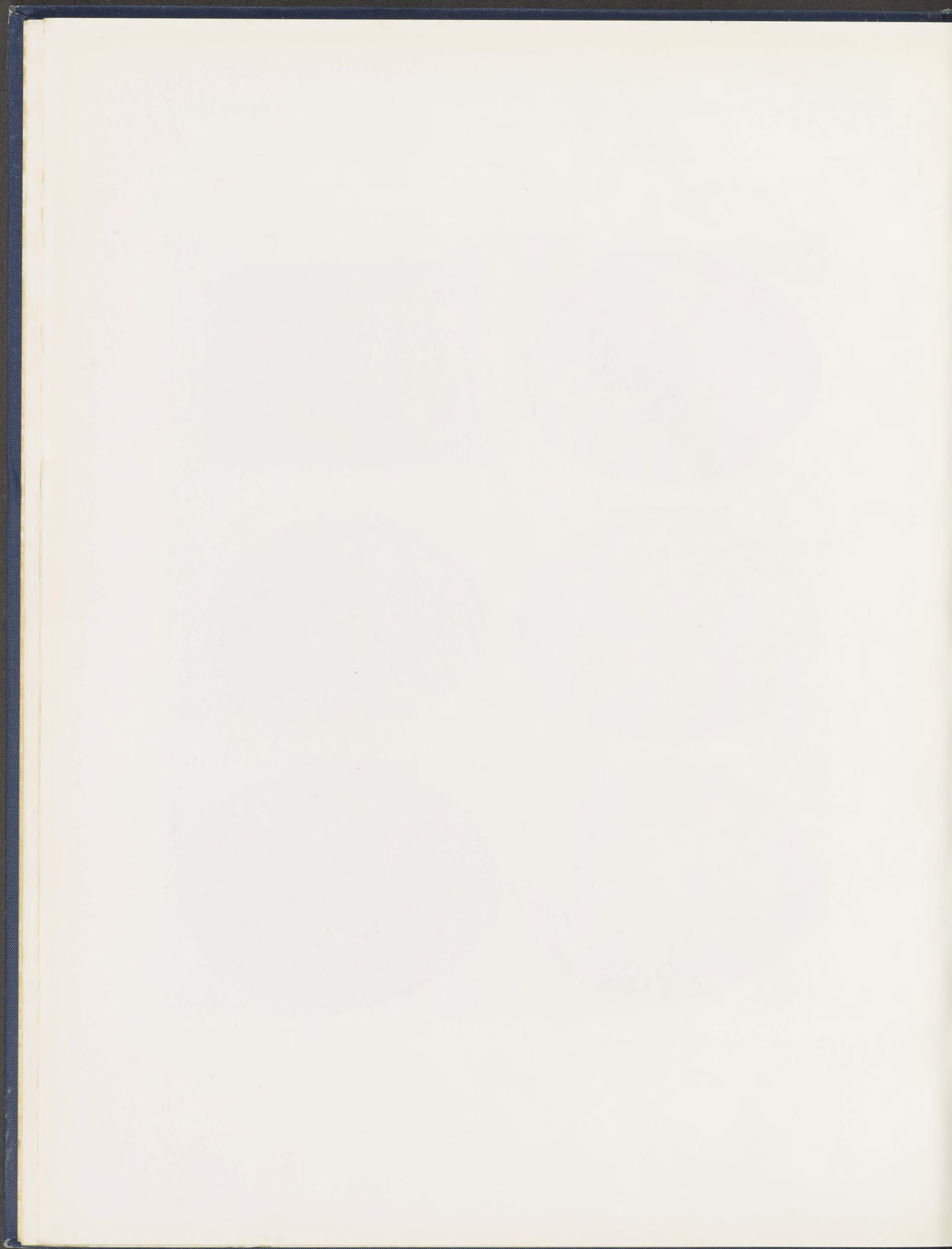


ENGLISH, EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.





ENGLISH, EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.



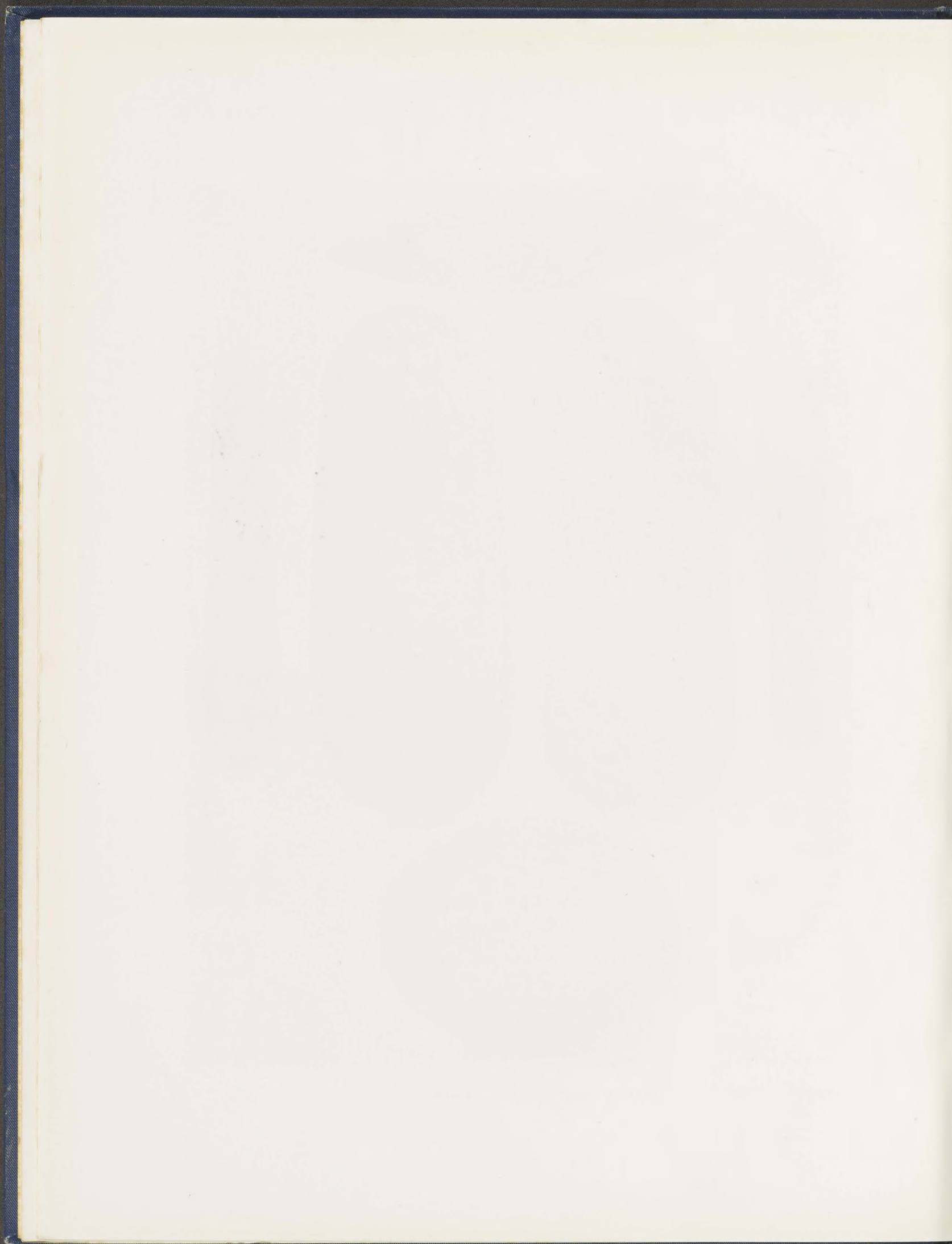


ENGLISH, EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.





ENGLISH, EIGHTEENTH CENTURY, CHIPPENDALE PERIOD.





ENGLISH, EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.



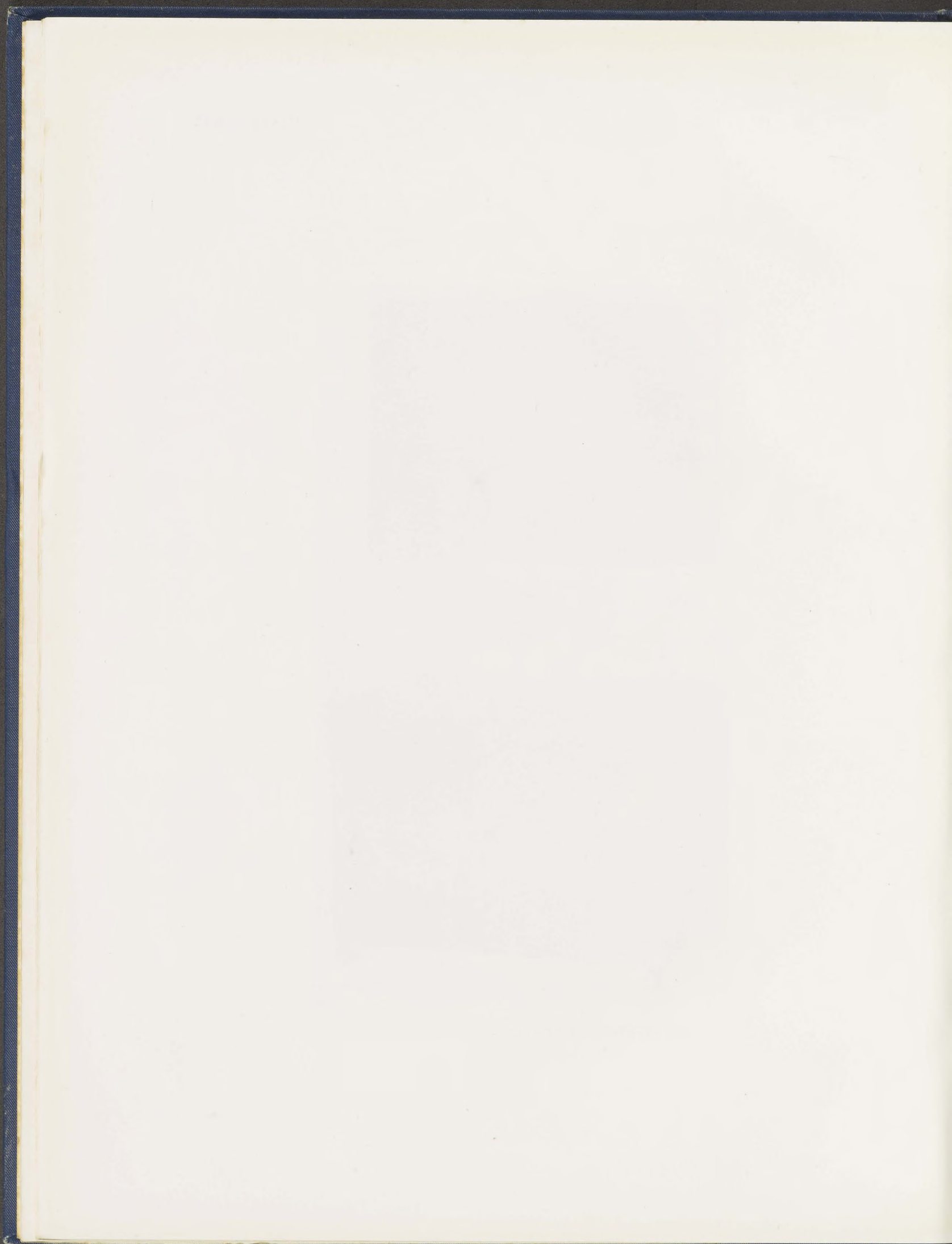


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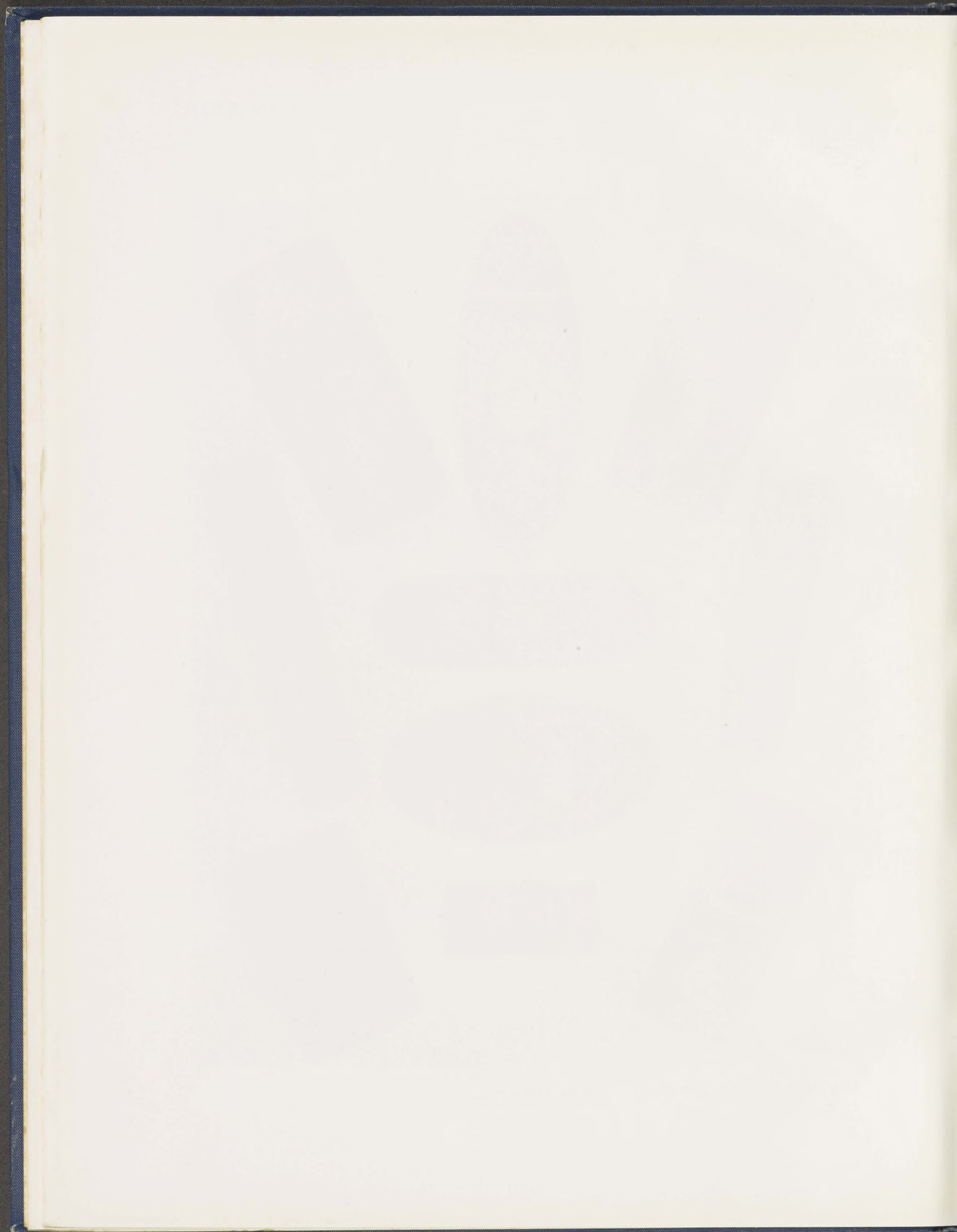


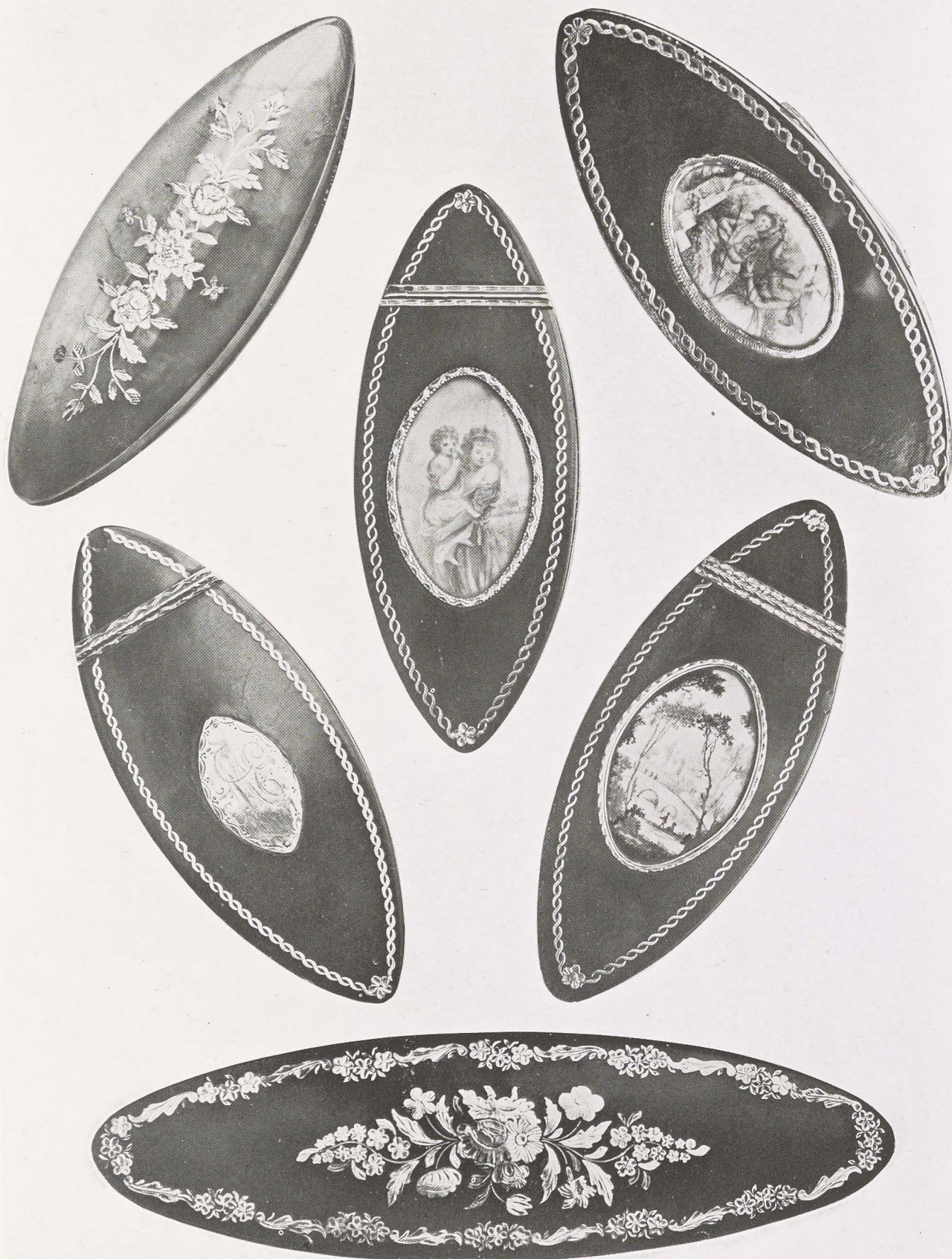
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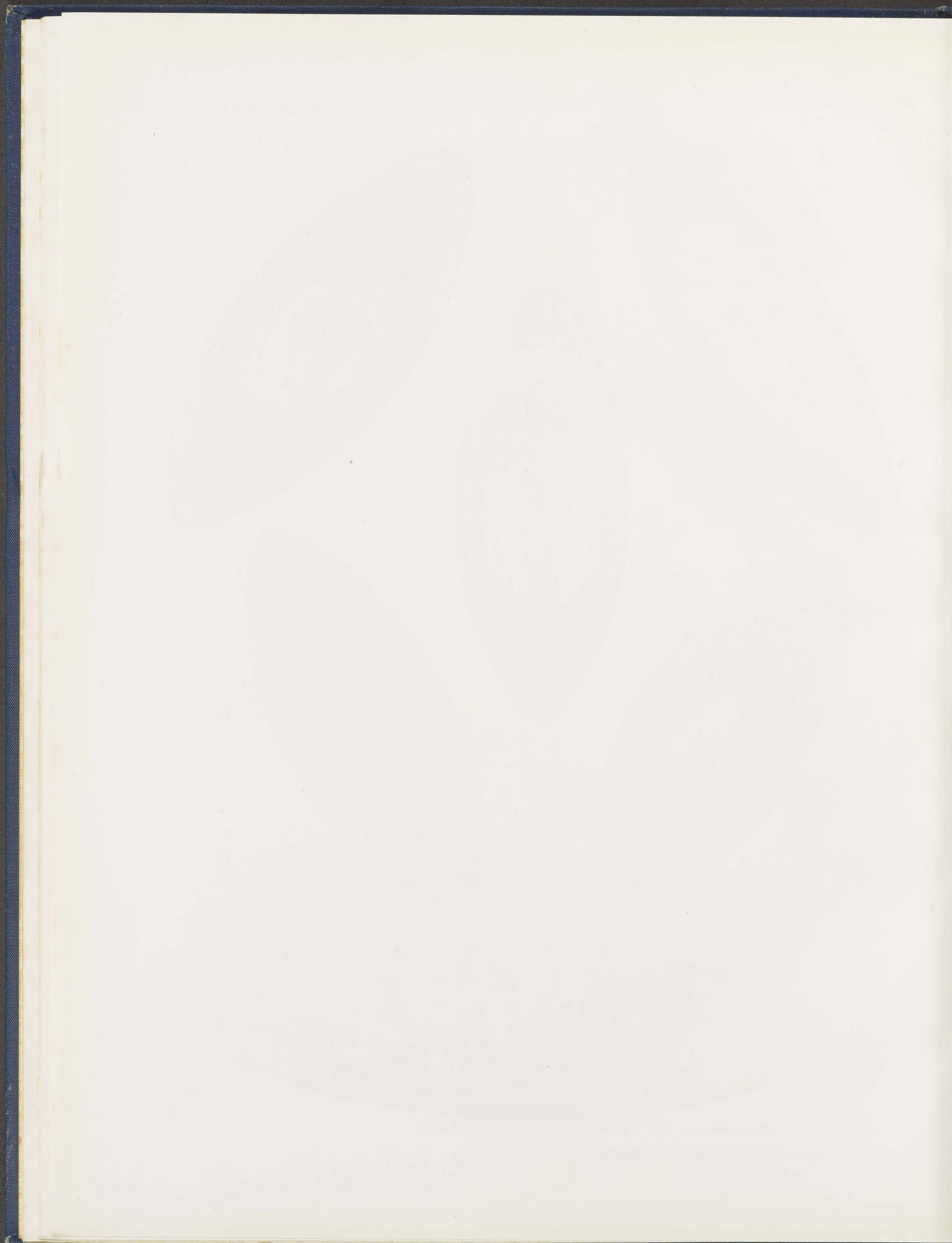


ENGLISH, EIGHTEENTH CENTURY, ADAM PERIOD.





ENGLISH, EIGHTEENTH CENTURY, SHERATON PERIOD.





ENGLISH, EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.



The expert piqué craftsman of this date—1750 to 1760—reproduced with great faithfulness the designs of the Italian Renaissance. Had Benvenuto Cellini been a piqué craftsman, the trinket-box illustrated (Plate XXII.) might well have been the work of that great master himself, so true is it to the Renaissance type, the masks and arabesques, the flowing line, the foliated and floriated scrolls, all being rendered with the most absolute fidelity.

About 1762 Robert Adam returned from his foreign travels, but it was probably not until 1775 to 1778, when the brothers Adam issued a series of folio engravings, that the minor art of piqué began to feel the influence of their decorative designs. From this date till towards the end of the century piqué articles exhibiting the favourite Adam decoration are plentiful, the oval and circular pateræ, the honeysuckle, the pendent husks, swags of drapery, festoons, urns, and fan ornaments, being represented in one or other of the numerous specimens of the Adam period. The modern twentieth-century piqué consists practically only of Adam designs, closely approximating to the originals. The chief piqué articles of the Adam period include small toilet trays, vinaigrettes, scent-bottles, bodkin-cases, étuis, and patch-boxes (Plate XXXIII.). The work is interesting, but does not compare, for refined craftsmanship, with the period immediately preceding it.

Shuttle-shaped patch-boxes dating about 1780 to 1790, with a cable pattern round the periphery, and rose decoration where the cables meet, form a very attractive series. The cable pattern exactly corresponds to the effect conveyed by the narrow inlay in various coloured woods, found in the clock-cases, table legs, knife-boxes, etc., in the best Sheraton style, the similarity being heightened by the cable twists being alternately in silver and gold, or in two shades of the more precious metal. These shuttle-shaped boxes always have in the centre of the lid an oval patera, or an oval miniature corresponding to the shuttle-shape of the box (Plate XXIV.). Of this period also are the large and small shuttles illustrated, the larger being in dark and the smaller in blonde tortoiseshell.

An account of eighteenth-century English piqué cannot be concluded without referring to a series of tortoiseshell snuff-boxes of basket-work pattern (Plate XXV.), the squares so formed being further defined by piqué clous d'or. In rare cases, however, the clous d'or may be inserted in the centres of the squares. Most of these boxes are slightly curved to fit comfortably in the hip pocket; they are not of a particularly artistic character, and serve gradually to prepare one for the decadence of the piqué art in the nineteenth century. I would here mention that the skene d'hus worn by the Highland regiments of to-day have for their handles similar basket-work pattern made of horn or composition, the squares being defined by copper or brass studs; the skene d'hus handles in the late eighteenth century were made of shell piquéd in gold. The decadence of furniture design in the last phase of the Sheraton period was mainly due to the introduction of ultra-classical ornamentation, "resulting in a depraved English Empire style." Similarly, we find that the art of piqué, ever dependent on the furniture design of the period, correspondingly fails at the close of the eighteenth century.

CHAPTER V.

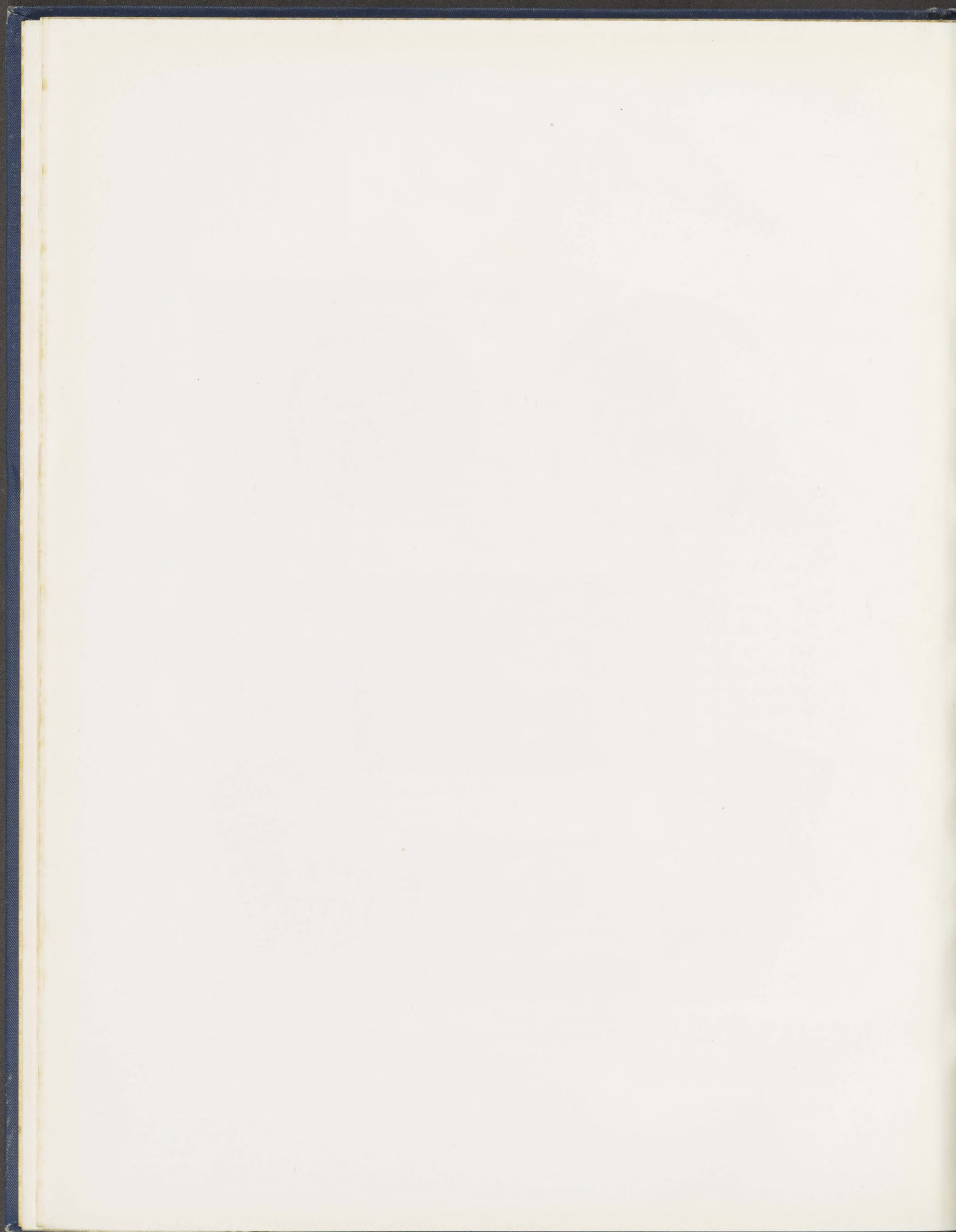
THIRD ENGLISH PERIOD, NINETEENTH CENTURY.

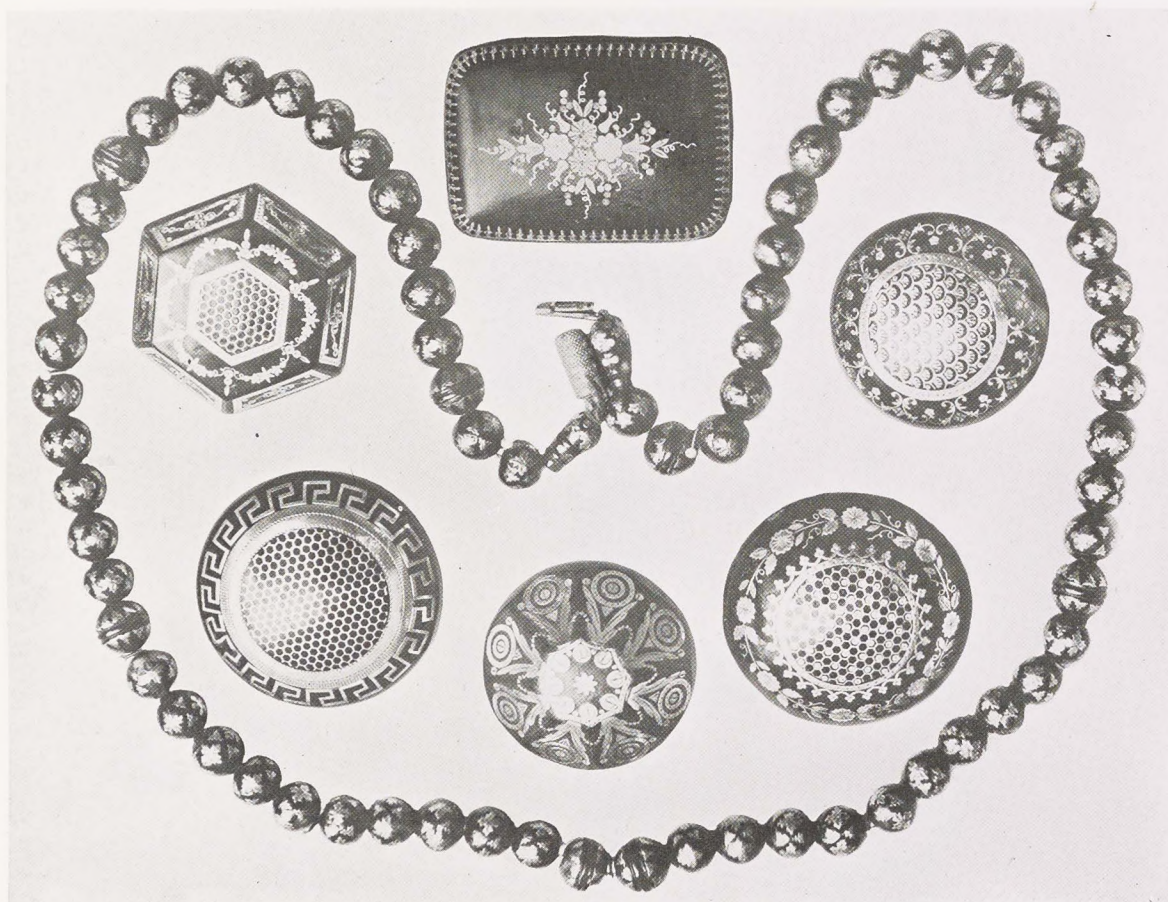
 IN view of the quotation at the end of the last chapter, it will be readily understood that the task of describing piqué of the nineteenth century is not wholly satisfactory. Quite at the commencement of the century, in the pre-Victorian period, specimens with some claim to artistic merit were produced, as the illustrations (Plate XXVI.) will show, but such are few and far between. The writer does not wish the conclusion to be drawn that the workmanship was not good, because the very converse is the case; in fact, the actual piqué decoration throughout the time of George IV., William IV., and the early Victorian period is of better quality than is found at the end of the eighteenth century. But where the art suffered so greatly was in the heavy and cumbrous character of most of the various articles produced. Piqué work of this period is nearly in every case of the posé variety, being in many instances quite excellent in its quality. Most of the articles made were those associated with personal adornment, such as ear-rings, studs, necklets, pendants, brooches, and bracelets. That the workmanship was of exceptional quality is proved by the fact that it is quite rare to come across an instance among these trinkets (which must have been greatly exposed to wear and tear) where the inlay of gold or silver is not as perfect as it was on the day the article was made. Moreover, I am informed by a manufacturer of the present-day piqué that to reproduce the adornments as worn by our grandmothers would be an exceedingly expensive commission, and thus he pays a tribute to the excellent workmanship of the piqué of the period, however unattractive it may be in form and design. Added decoration of mother-of-pearl is distinctly rare, but a few specimens will be noted in the illustrations (Plates XXVII. and XXVIII.).

As we approach the mid-Victorian time, the manufacture of piqué seems to fall altogether into abeyance, and it was not until quite the end of the reign that piqué again began to be manufactured. Such manufacture is carried on largely to-day, and consists mostly of articles of the toilet, such as brushes, combs, hand-mirrors, pin-boxes, trays, etc. The designs are good, being very reminiscent of the Adam period; but the piqué work itself is a purely mechanical process, the inlay of gold or silver being stamped out with a cutter, and pressed home between metal plates

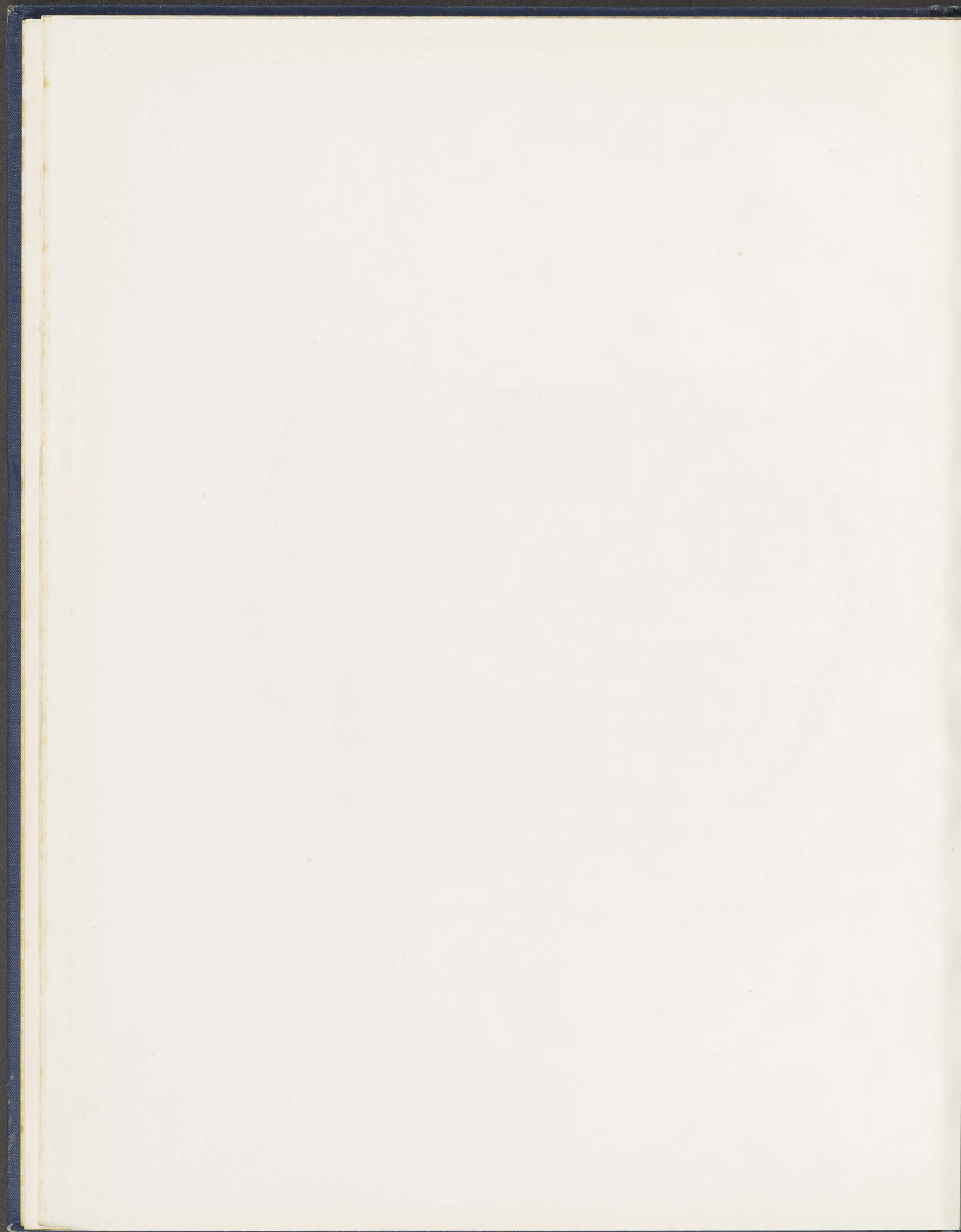


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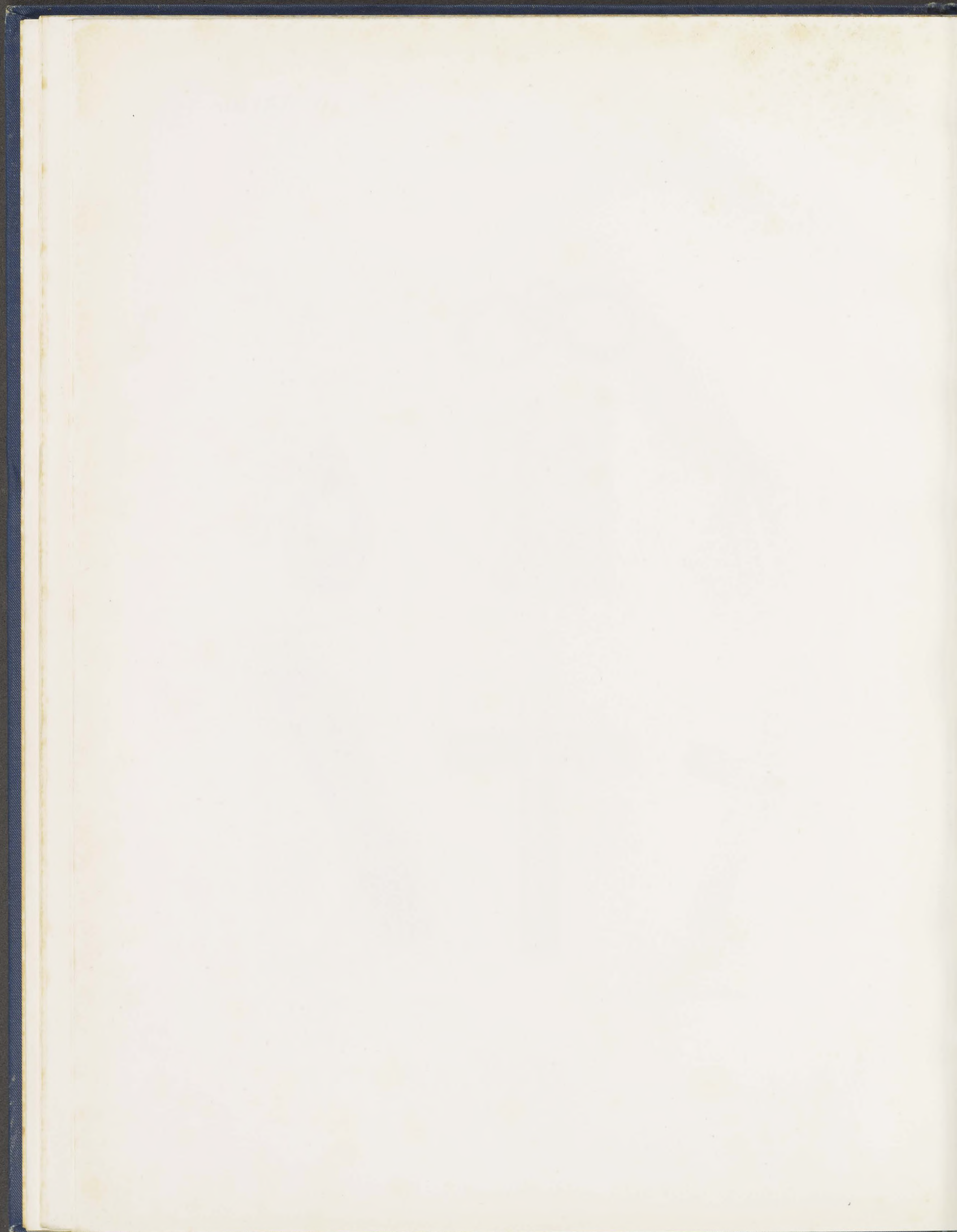


ENGLISH, NINETEENTH CENTURY.





ENGLISH, NINETEENTH CENTURY.



on to the softened medium. Unfortunately, no attempt has been made to reproduce the beautiful point-work of the original French art. Useful and beautiful as the articles made to-day undoubtedly are, they do not pretend to compete with the truly artistic productions of the earlier periods. As we have said, reproduction of point piqué is not even attempted, and is probably unattainable; and this fact places the collector of specimens of this beautiful art on safe ground, even in the earliest stages of following his hobby, as he is in the happy position of not having to pay heavily for his early experience, so commonly the fate of those who collect engravings, china, glass, or furniture. For the same reason, there is no necessity for one writing on the subject of piqué to indite a chapter on frauds and forgeries, an addition very necessary in most other branches of the antique, so freely and so skilfully imitated by the craftsmen of to-day. Perhaps, however, in this connection, a word of warning may be given with regard to combs, boxes, toilet trays, etc., of Italian manufacture, sold so freely in Naples, Florence, and throughout the towns of the Riviera. These are generally of celluloid in imitation of tortoiseshell, and decorated with gilt clous in imitation of piqué. These articles are attractive at first sight, but quite fail on close inspection. The gilt points in all cases are fixed on with glue or some adhesive material, and soon flake off, leaving the piece all too exposed as a base imitation. Many of these pieces have been purposely dulled, and have been from time to time offered to me in second-rate shops of the Metropolis as genuine piqué. No dealer of any reputation would seek to palm off upon his client such a base substitute for the genuine article, and it is scarcely conceivable that a collector with any appreciation of art could allow himself to fall into so obvious a trap.



CHAPTER VI.

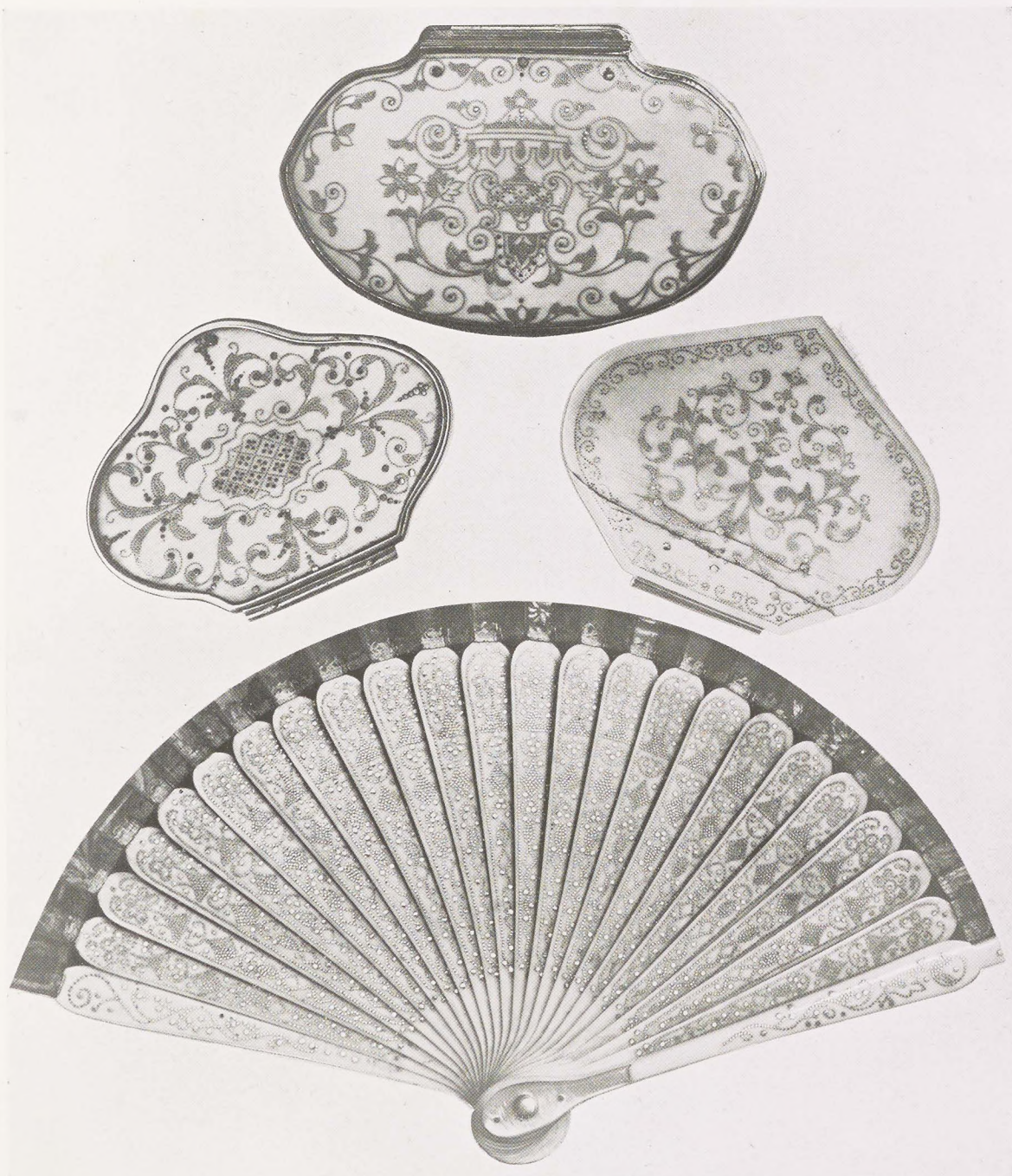
PIQUÉ ON THE IVORY MEDIUM.



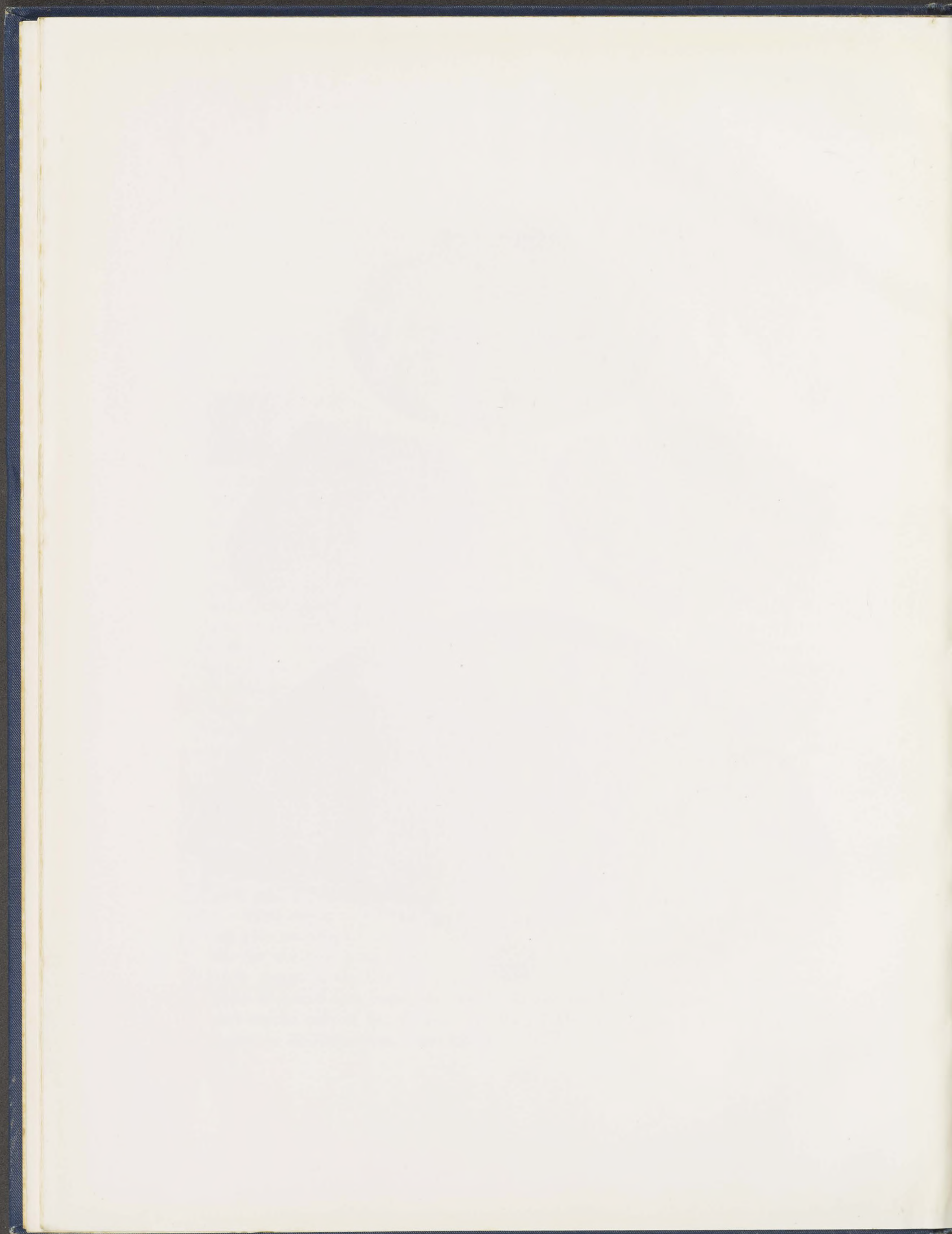
As a medium for the art of piqué, ivory was far less extensively used than tortoiseshell, and this was probably due to the fact that the shell could be more easily moulded, and therefore lent itself to adaptation rather more readily than ivory; also its translucency greatly added to the effect of the inlay, and it was consequently the favourite medium with the craftsmen in the art. The remarks already made with regard to the special designs associated with the various periods apply equally with reference to the ivory medium. In the Louis XIV. period, piqué on ivory is distinctly uncommon. Among the specimens illustrated, special notice is drawn to a very beautiful fan (Plate XXIX.), the rays of which are piquéd in silver point in the conventional style. The work is of the very finest description, the points piercing the ivory completely, and thus forming a pattern on the reverse side identical with that on the front. So closely are the points placed that it is quite wonderful how the medium has held together, and it is a great tribute to the craftsman responsible for this beautiful example of pierced piqué that scarcely a point has become displaced after the lapse of so many years since it came into being. The rays forming the two outer guards—"panaches"—of this fan are piquéd in clous d'argent in place of the points, affording a most pleasing effect. The thumb-piece at the base of each guard is decorated with mother-of-pearl, which in this instance is not engraved, thus forming a rare exception to the rule applying to nearly all specimens of Louis XIV. piqué.

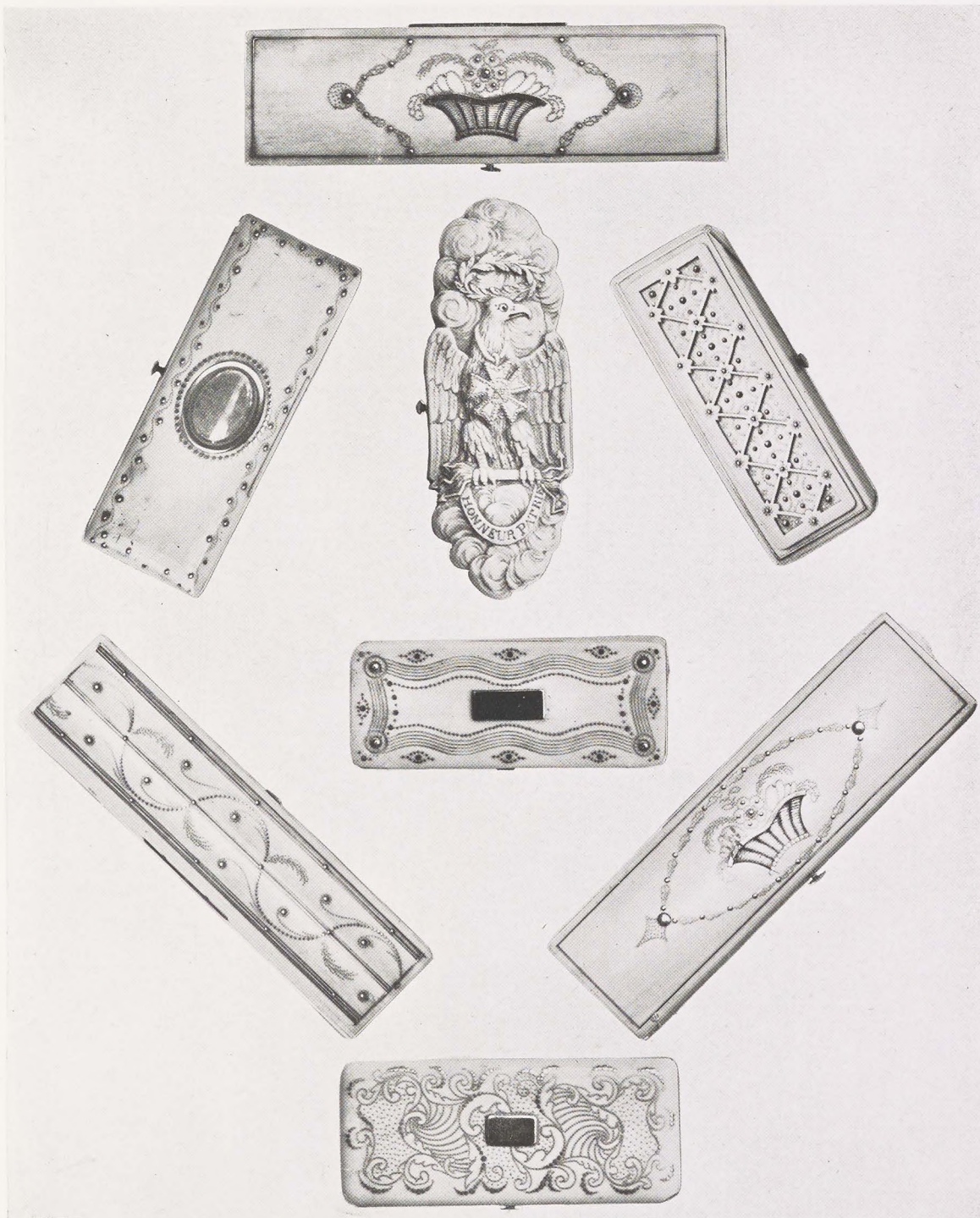
Specimens on the ivory medium during the Louis XV. period are even more scarce than in the Louis XIV.; but in the Louis XVI. period, and up to and including the early years of the Second Empire, the ivory medium was much in evidence, patch-boxes, toothpick cases, needle and bodkin cases, being freely decorated with gold piqué, both point and posé.

With regard to the three English periods, specimens of the seventeenth century are quite uncommon. A tobacco-box (*temp.* Charles II.) is illustrated (Plate XXXI.), the lid and case being of ivory, and the former being decorated with the familiar circle design of the time. The ivory heads of tasselled malacca canes were sometimes decorated with piqué; the author has seen two dated specimens of Charles II., and similar ones of the William and Mary (1689) and Queen Anne (1703) periods appear in the illustrations (Plate XXXI.).



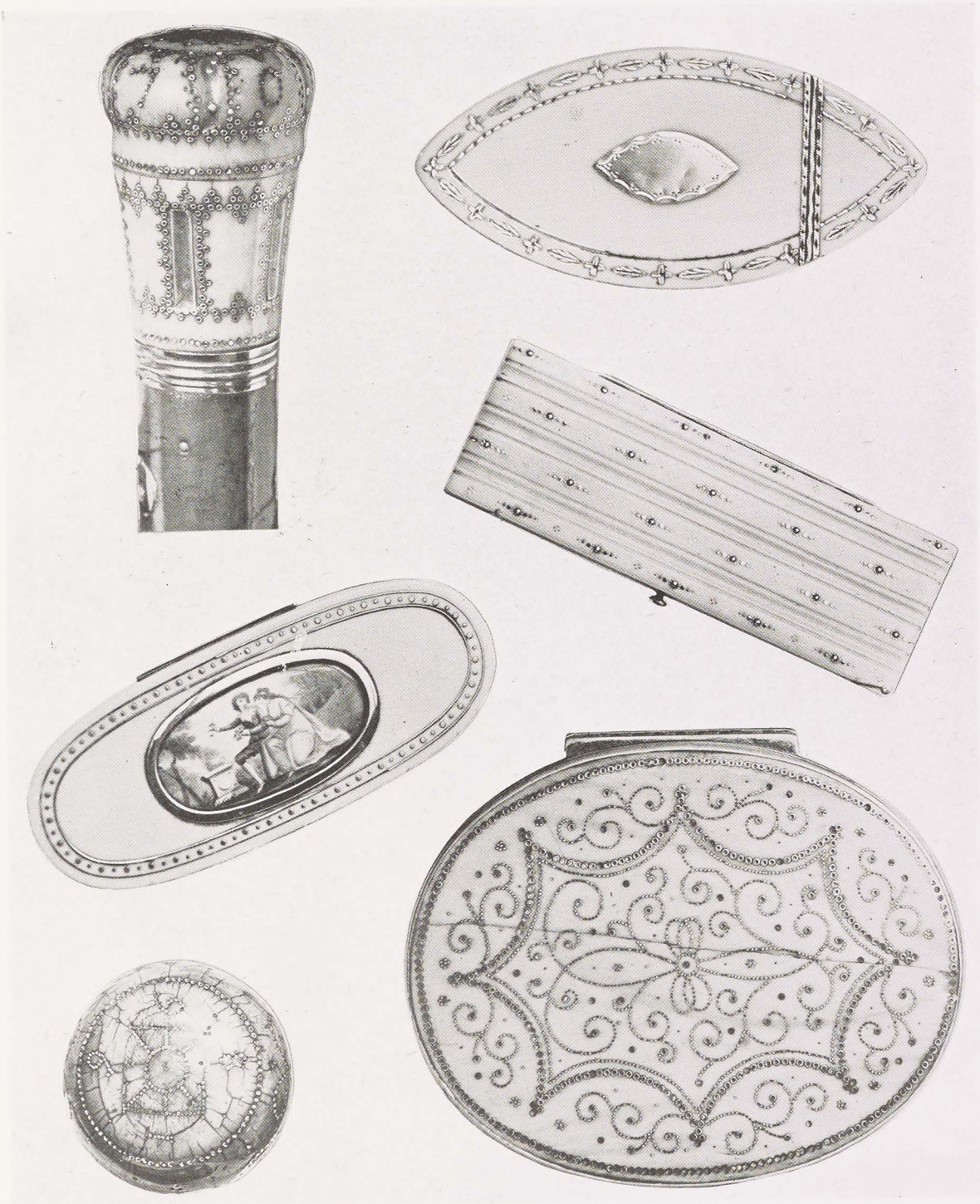
PIQUÉ ON IVORY.



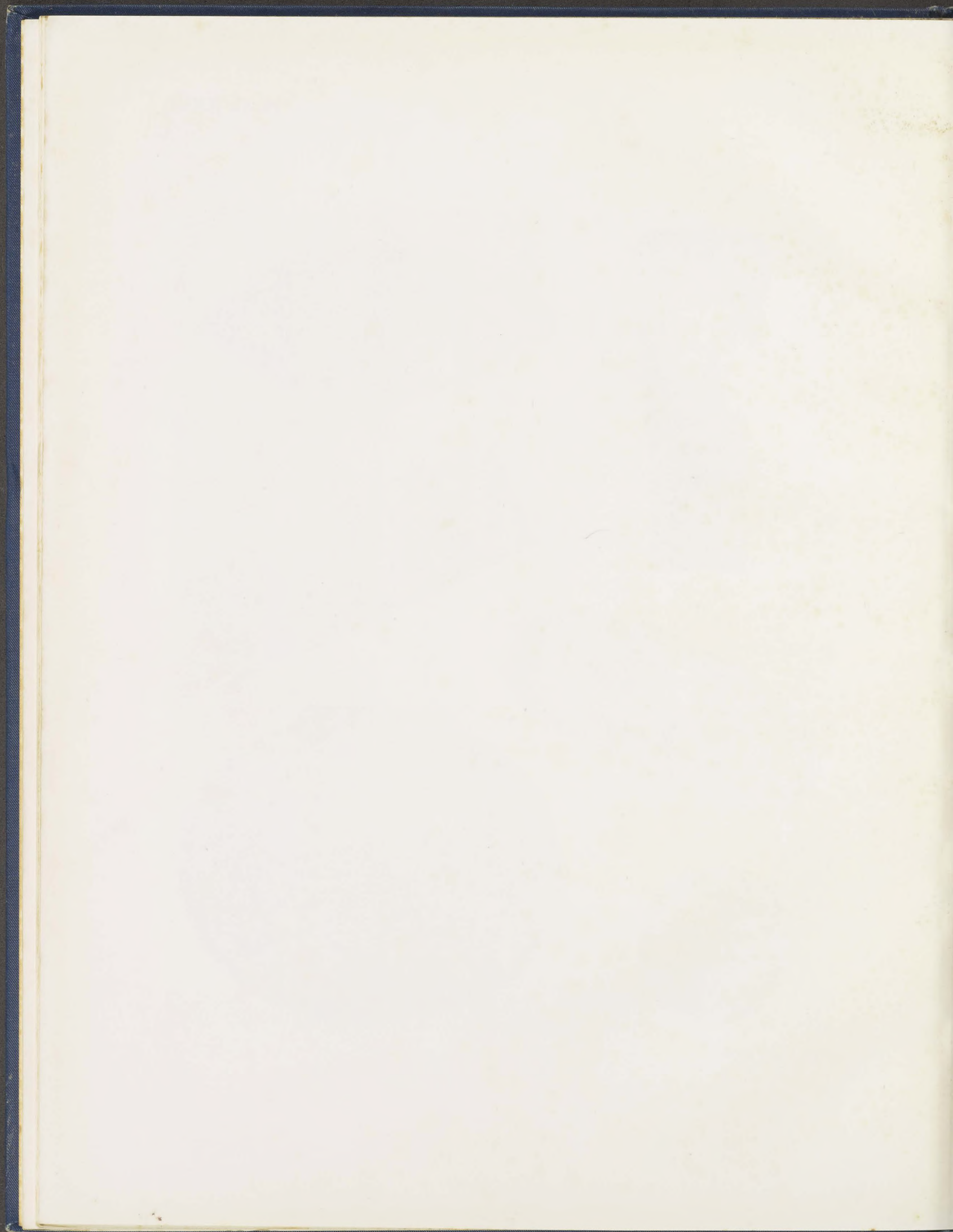


PIQUÉ ON IVORY.





PIQUÉ ON IVORY.

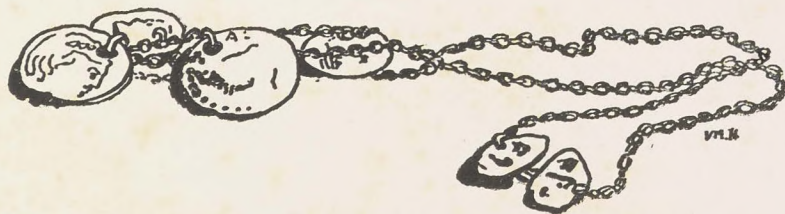


It has already been stated that this last-mentioned example is probably one of the very latest specimens produced in purely circle decoration, and can therefore fairly be included in the seventeenth-century period.

In the early part of the eighteenth century, as in the corresponding French period of Louis XV., scarcely any piqué on ivory was manufactured; and it is not until quite the end of the century that the revival of French work on the ivory medium stimulated similar effort on the part of workers in England. No pieces of great moment were produced, and were limited to trifles such as patch-boxes, etc., and in no case did the work accomplished approach, for artistry and delicacy of detail, that of the French craftsman. About the third decade of the nineteenth century, work on the ivory medium altogether disappears, both in France and England, for in the somewhat mechanical process associated with the late nineteenth century, tortoiseshell is the only medium used in both countries.

I desire to draw special attention to the Napoleonic toothpick case (Plate XXX.); the ivory is finely carved, piqué only appearing in the decoration on the breast of the Imperial eagle. This interesting specimen belonged to my wife's nephew, Commander Cunningham, R.N. His great-great-grandfather was the naval surgeon on board the *Bellerophon*, to whom Napoleon I. presented the case, and also a book, as a mark of appreciation for services rendered.

I cannot conclude these notes on piqué on ivory without referring to a very fine set of knife and fork handles of German origin, to be seen at the Victoria and Albert Museum, and dated 1680. Oddly enough, the silver circle—the outstanding decoration of English seventeenth-century piqué—is greatly in evidence in these excellent examples. They are of considerably later date than the earliest English specimens with similar design, so that I think we are right in claiming that this special form of decoration originated in this country, and was elaborated in Germany at a later time.

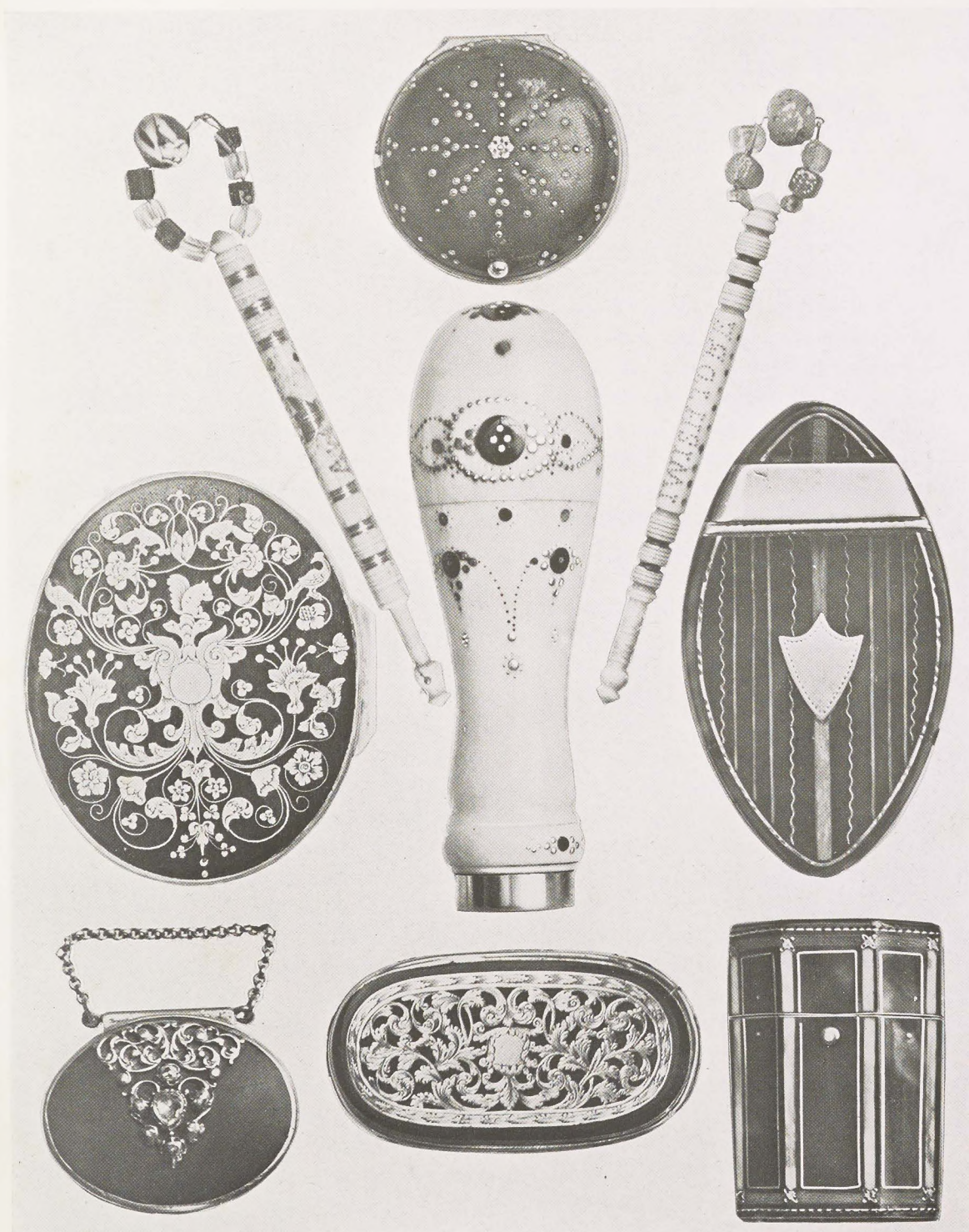


CHAPTER VII.

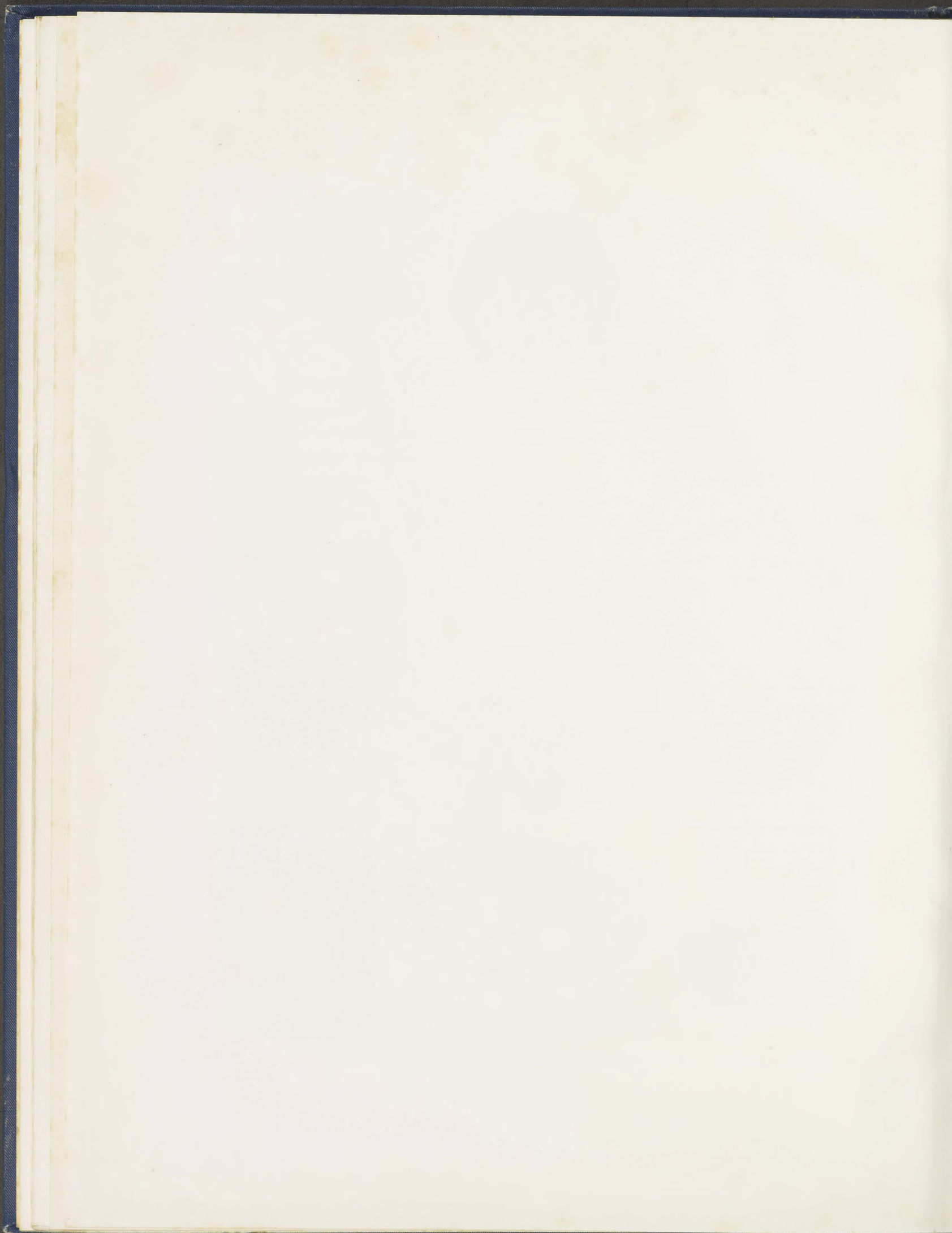
SPECIMENS OF CRAFTSMANSHIP ALLIED TO OR IN IMITATION OF PIQUÉ.



It will be remembered that in the opening chapter, the definition of piqué was stated to be "the decoration of tortoiseshell or ivory with gold or silver, either point or posé, and the added embellishment of mother-of-pearl in a large number of cases," and it was further stated that this description has held good for some three hundred years, through which long period we have attempted to follow this minor art. Following these notes are given (Plate XXXII.) a few illustrations of specimens which, although allied to piqué, do not absolutely fulfil the requirements laid down by the above definition. Variations from true piqué consist mainly in the use of various media other than tortoiseshell and ivory, such as horn, wood, shagreen, marble, agate, and composition. In none of these cases is the effect so pleasing as when the recognised media are used, and it is due to this fact that specimens other than on tortoiseshell and ivory are so rarely found. Also several examples are shown in the illustrations of chased and pierced silver on tortoiseshell where the decoration is raised above the medium, instead of being pressed home, as in the case of piqué. Other specimens are shown where the one recognised medium has been used as an added decoration for the other. This was more often the case with regard to the ivory on the shell, and in many cases an added decorative effect was obtained by staining the ivory green, blue, black, or red, with most pleasing results. The bell-handle, probably of the Adam period, is a rare specimen, showing, as it does, the use of the shell medium as an added decoration to the ivory. Occasionally one comes across a Vernis-Martin box where the star decoration associated with the piqué of the Louis XVI. period has been successfully imitated on the tortoiseshell medium by the use of this attractive varnish. Two examples are given of old English lace bobbins of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; in both of these it will be noticed that point piqué has been imitated, the ivory being stained in various colours in the form of names and mottoes. In other bobbins I have in my possession, small clous of pewter have been inlaid on the ivory or wood, as the case may be. During the late eighteenth century, shagreen, mostly in the form of watch-cases and étuis, was freely used as a medium for embellishment with clous d'or, and with quite pleasing effect; indeed, next to the recognised media for the craft of piqué, shagreen, in my opinion, is the most successful.



SPECIMENS ALLIED TO OR IN IMITATION OF PIQUÉ.



CHAPTER VIII.

SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES.

IN the opening chapter it was stated that no English encyclopædia had any reference to the art of piqué; its early history and origin, I greatly fear, are buried in oblivion. One can therefore only surmise as to its incidence. I had hoped to find some reference in *Evelyn's Diary* to the piqué art, as the output in London of tobacco-boxes, stick-heads, watch-cases, etc., with piqué decoration, must in his time have been quite considerable. Evelyn was so devoted to art, and refers in his classic on so many occasions to matters artistic, that it was quite within reasonable expectation some such reference might have been found. I was, however, unable to trace any mention of piqué, and his descendant, Mr. John Evelyn, has kindly informed me that, as far as he is aware, there is no reference to the art in the unpublished portions of the original script of the *Diary*.

The authorities at the great art library in Paris were most courteous in reply to my inquiries for information, but could state nothing of a definite nature—indeed, their reply synchronises with that received from Mr. Penderel-Brodhurst, to whom, as one of the greatest authorities on the closely allied art of Boulle, I wrote for enlightenment as regards the origin of piqué. I am sure he will forgive me quoting a portion of his letter, in which he writes:—"I share your admiration of piqué work, but practically nothing seems to be known as to its history. It is, of course, quite possible that the elder Boulle may have been its inventor—the dates would allow of it—but as a rule the names of the early furniture-makers and decorators have not been recorded. Boulle is probably the earliest name known to us in this connection in France, just as Chippendale is the first name known to us in England. I have examined all my books on furniture, especially those on French furniture, without obtaining any light on the subject. There is a brief article on piqué in *Havard's Dictionnaire*, but it contains no information, and I fear the problem must be regarded as insoluble."

Mr. Penderel-Brodhurst agrees that I may well be right as regards my dates for the earliest and most brilliant French work, because, "had it been much later, we should probably have some clue to its originator, since the French began to preserve the names of their mobiliary artists much earlier than we did." The elder Boulle referred to in Mr. Penderel-Brodhurst's letter may have been either Jean Boulle, the father of Charles André Boulle, the most famous of his name, or more probably

another member of the family, Pierre Boulle, who died in 1636, and who occupied the position for many years of "tourneur et menuisier de roy, des cabinets d'ebene."

With regard to the two piqué media, tortoiseshell and ivory, interesting notes appear in the *Dictionarium Polygraphicum*, published in 1735:—"Tortoiseshell.—Used in inlaying, and various other uses, as snuff-boxes and other utensils. The shell of the caret, one of the four kinds of sea tortoise, is the only one used, and the under-shell only of this. To separate it from the upper, they make a little fire beneath it, and soon as ever 'tis warm, the under-shell becomes easily separable from the upper with the point of a knife, and is taken off in laminæ, or leaves, without killing the animal, which 'tis said, being turned to sea again, gets a new shell. The whole shell of the caret consists in thirteen leaves, eight of them flat and five a little bent. Of the flat ones, there are four large ones, about a foot long and seven inches broad. The best shell is thick, clear, and transparent, of the colour of antimony sprinkled with brown and white."

With regard to the other piqué medium, *ivory*, the *Dictionarium* quotes from Dioscorides, born at Anazartus, in Cilicia, in the first century A.D., the author of a *Materia Medica* in five volumes. Dioscorides says:—"By boiling ivory for the space of six hours with the root of mandragoras, it will become soft and tractable, that it may be managed as one pleases. Also to soften ivory, lay it for twelve hours in aqua-fortis, then three days in juice of beet, and it will become tender, and you work it into what form you please. To harden it again, lay it in strong vinegar."

Under the head of "Tortoiseshell" in the latest edition of the *British Encyclopædia* will be found the following notes, which may be of interest:—"The tortoiseshell of commerce consists of the epidermic plates of the hawksbill turtle (*Chelonia imbrecata*), the smallest of the sea turtles. The plates of tortoiseshell consist of horny matter, but they are harder, more brittle, and less fibrous than ordinary horn. Their value depends on the rich mottled colours they display—a warm translucent yellow, dashed and spotted with rich brown tints—and on the high polish they take and retain. The plates, as separated by heat from the bony skeleton, are keeled, curved, and irregular in form. They are first flattened by heat and pressure, and superficial irregularities are rasped away. Being harder and more brittle than horn, tortoiseshell requires more careful treatment in moulding it into any form, and as high heat tends to darken and obscure the material, it is treated at as low a heat as practicable. For many purposes it is necessary to increase the thickness, or add to the superficial size of tortoiseshell, and this is readily done by careful cleaning and rasping of the surfaces to be united, softening the plates in boiling water, or sometimes by dry heat, and then pressing them tightly together by means of heated pincers or a vice. The heat softens and liquefies a superficial film of the horny material, and that, with the pressure, effects a perfect union of the surfaces brought together. Heat and pressure are also employed to mould the substance into boxes and the numerous artificial forms into which it is made up."

Although it does not give any actual description of piqué, elaborate instructions

for preparing the media used in the art are given in Vol. III., Chapter xi., of a work entitled *Secrets concernant les Arts et Métiers*, published in Paris in 1790. I must refer those interested in the subject to this excellent treatise, a copy of which can be seen at the British Museum library. Among the articles contained in the chapter referred to are included, "To mould snuff-boxes in tortoiseshell," "To solder tortoiseshell," "To soften ivory," and "To dye ivory black, red, blue, and green." The details of these various processes must necessarily be full of interest to the piqué enthusiast. The methods recommended in this French work are, as regards the tortoiseshell medium at least, practically the same as those adopted by the manufacturers of toilet and other tortoiseshell articles of to-day.

I cannot conclude these notes on a beautiful art, the pursuit of which has been my favourite hobby through many years of a busy professional life, without expressing my sincere thanks for the help and encouragement I have consistently received from the experts, the art auctioneers, and the various antique dealers of the metropolis. My grateful thanks are due to Mr. C. Reginald Grundy, Editor of *THE CONNOISSEUR*, and to Mr. J. G. J. Penderel-Brodhurst, for much encouragement; also to the Conservateur of the Louvre and the Secretary of the "Bibliothèque d'Art et Archéologie" of the Rue Spontini, Paris; and to Mr. Mitchell, of the Victoria and Albert Museum, who has been most helpful in giving me every information at his disposal. I would specially wish also to thank Mr. N. Hill-Archer, of Puttick & Simpson's, among the auctioneers; and Messrs. Parsons, of Tessier's; Mr. Cole, of Law, Foulsham & Cole's; Mr. Sidney Cooper, of Parkes', Vigo Street; and Mr. Victor Crichton, of Kensington, among the dealers. Also my thanks are due to Messrs. Batson, of Brewer Street, for allowing me to study the details of production of the beautiful tortoiseshell articles of the toilet-table which represent the piqué of to-day, and thus compare present methods with those described in the old French work referred to above. My thanks are specially due to Mr. Palmer, of Messrs. Wicksteed & Palmer's, for the infinite care he has taken in his difficult work of photographing the specimens selected for illustration; at best, a somewhat thankless task, as it is almost impossible to convey an adequate idea of the extraordinary delicacy of design and beauty of colouring of many of the finer specimens. Last, but not least, my thanks are due to my wife, for her great help in preparing and typing the sheets for the press, for her excellent judgment and the ready aid she has afforded me at all times in forming the collection of piqué, typical specimens of which I have endeavoured to place before my readers. I am fully conscious that I have done nothing like justice to a subject which, on account of its charm and beauty, should have inspired the best, but trust that my effort may at least create a wider interest in the beautiful art of piqué, and stimulate another to indite a work more worthy of such a fascinating handicraft.

This concluding chapter on piqué is illustrated with a few specimens of special interest or rarity, which are fairly representative of the whole period through which we have endeavoured to follow this interesting art.

No. i.—An oval snuff-box, presenting on the lid two figures, male and female, in Northern European dress of the seventeenth century. The details of these figures and the costumes are worked out in *clous* of gold and silver, with single circle decoration in the same metals. The workmanship is very similar to that on the handles of a set of knives and forks of North German origin, dated 1680, to be seen in the Victoria and Albert Museum, which have already been referred to in the chapter devoted to "Piqué on Ivory." The author has only met with some half-dozen snuff-boxes of this particular *genre*, of which the specimen illustrated is quite a brilliant example.

No. ii.—This box has a representation on the lid of the signing of the Treaty of Alliance in 1726 at Vienna, between Austria and Spain, arranging in its articles for the restoration of Gibraltar to Spain and for placing the Pretender on the British throne. Among the pendent arms will be noted the Paschal Lamb, the badge of the Common Order of the Golden Fleece, which may well have been bestowed on James Francis Edward Stuart; also the Lilies and the Lions, probably representing the Pretender's coat of arms as King of France and Britain: the Pretender is the central figure at the table, the crown being slightly elevated above his head to represent him as the uncrowned king. There is no piqué decoration on the lid, but on the base will be noticed, in point piqué, the date of the Treaty, 1726, and the initials of the young Pretender, by whom it was presented to a relative of David Wilkie, the artist, in recognition of services rendered to the Stuart cause after the débâcle of Culloden in 1746.

No. iii.—Represents a very interesting hinged snuff-box. It may be remembered that this fine hair-work, a differentiation of piqué posé, has already been referred to when considering the English piqué work of the mid-eighteenth century. That such boxes were produced from 1740 to 1750 is undoubted, but the specimen under consideration proves that similar work was first produced in England some seventy-five years earlier. It will be noticed that the circle decoration of the Stuart period is in this instance associated with the hair-work, and I have also quite recently discovered in the Victoria and Albert Museum three watches and cases, the latter decorated in very similar manner. These watches were made by Johannes Bayes, J. Bushman, and Richard Colston, respectively admitted to the Clockmakers' Company in 1647, 1670, and 1682. Each watch-case presents a central design showing a definite Oriental influence, and it is to be noted that the same suggestion is shown on the base of the box under consideration. Recently I have been able to obtain a small oval snuff-box of the late period of Louis XIV., with hair-work in silver strands. Here the emblems of the king, the sun, and the sunflower are introduced, proving that the French, even as early as the late seventeenth century, had adopted this specialised form of piqué posé. Also in Mrs. Griffin's collection in Nottingham there is a fine specimen of the same period, the hair-work in this instance consisting of gold strands. To sum up, therefore, with regard to hair-work, it was, as far as one can gather, first made in England about the middle of the seventeenth century,



No. i.—LATE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY.
No. iv.—EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY.

PLATE XXXIV.

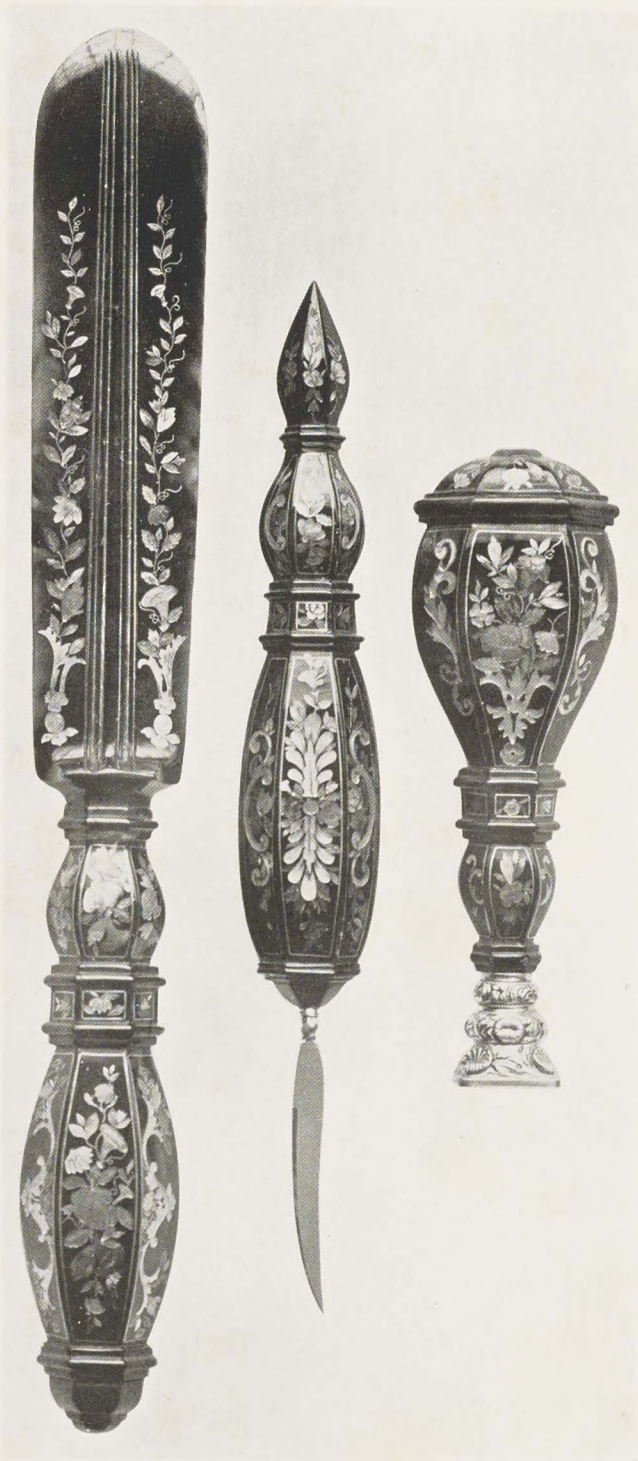


No. ii.—EARLY EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.
No. iii.—LATE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY.



No. v.—LOUIS XV.
No. vi.—LOUIS XVI.

PLATE XXXVI.



No. vii.—LOUIS PHILIPPE.

and a little later specimens were being produced by French craftsmen. It again came into fashion in England in the middle of the eighteenth century, and finally was reproduced by French workers with far more artistic elaboration in the time of Louis XVI. It is to be noted that this box constitutes the solitary instance known to the author of the occurrence of a Latin inscription on a piqué specimen. "*Vulnus ab angue ame causa data est*" it appears to read. To what incident of classic lore the representation refers I have been unable to discover.

No. iv.—A bouquet-holder of the early nineteenth century, the rays of which are encircled by a ring, so that the spread of the holder can be readily adapted as required to the size of the posy.

No. v. presents a candlestick with piqué decoration in gold or blonde tortoiseshell. This specimen came from the Kennedy collection, and illustrates the typical designs associated with the Louis XV. period.

No. vi.—A Louis XVI. circular tortoiseshell trinket-box, with the double circle decoration of the period, in three shades of gold and platinum. Platinum, then known by miners as "white gold," was only introduced from South America about the end of the eighteenth century. The use of this precious metal in the arts as early as the time of Louis XVI. is distinctly uncommon, and adds to the interest of this particular piqué specimen. Even the base of the box is completely covered, and the central scene on the lid is cleverly carried out in the same scheme of tinted gold and platinum.

No. vii.—A "writing set," consisting of seal, paper-cutter, and letter-opener. The decoration almost entirely consists of opalescent mother-of-pearl, the piqué proper being limited to a few leaves and tendrils. The work is very fine, of French origin (nineteenth century), and probably of the Louis Philippe period.

[All the articles illustrated in this volume, as well as many others, are on exhibition at the Castle Museum, Norwich, where they will remain during the author's lifetime, at least.]





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